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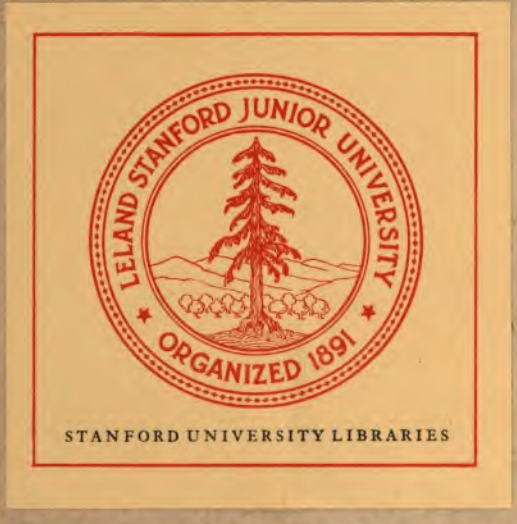
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AN

ENQUIRY

INTO THE

GROUND and FOUNDATION

OF

RELIGION.

Wherein is ſhewn, that Religion is founded in Nature. That is, that there is a right and wrong, a true and falſe Religion in Nature: And that Nature or Reaſon affords plain, obvious, certain principles, by which a man may diſtinguiſh theſe, and form a proper judgment in the caſe; and which an honeſt upright man may ſafely and ſecurely ſtay his mind upon, amidſt the various and contrary opinions that prevail in the world, with regard to this ſubject.

To which are added,

I. A POSTSCRIPT, occaſioned by the publication of Dr STEBBING's Viſitation-Charge, that had been delivered to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of *Wilts*.

II. A ſhort Diſſertation on *Matt.* xix. 21. *If thou wilt be perfect, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give to the poor, and thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven: and come and follow me.* Occaſioned by Dr STEBBING's unjuſt and groundleſs reflexion on the author, with regard to this text, in the aforeſaid Charge.

III. An Anſwer to a private letter, from a ſtranger to the author, on the ſubject of God's Foreknowledge.

By THOMAS CHUBB.

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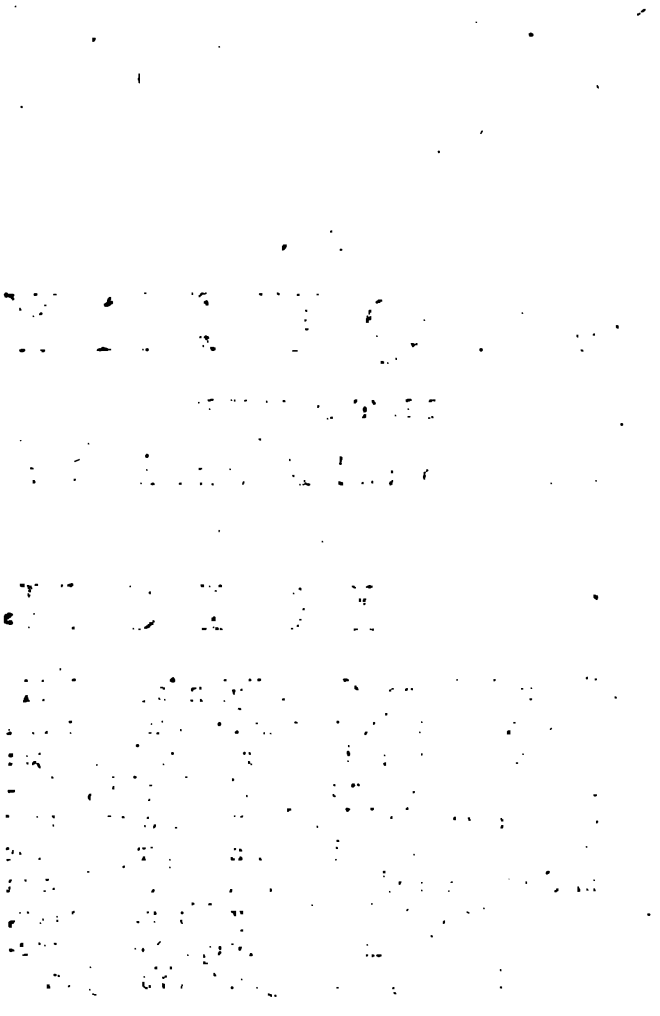

THE AUTHOR TO HIS READERS.

SIRS, as a farther teſtimony of my regard to your preſent and future well-doing, I have publiſhed the following Enquiry; the importance of which, I preſume, will ſufficiently juſtify my offering it to your conſideration. For, what queſtions can be of greater, or even of equal importance to men, who believe a Deity, and who live under an expectation of a future judgment and retribution than theſe; namely,

namely, what are the true and only grounds upon which intelligent beings may reaſonably hope to obtain God's favour? And, what are the true and only grounds upon which vicious men, when brought to a ſenſe of their guilt, may reaſonably hope to obtain the divine mercy? None ſurely. And, as theſe are points that are controverted, at leaſt amongſt Chriſtians, which ſhews the *diverſity* of mens ſentiments with regard to them: So I have, in the annexed papers, ſhewed that there are ſome *plain*, *obvious*, *certain principles* in *nature* or *reaſon* relating thereto, which every honeſt upright man may *ſafely* and *ſecurely* ſtay his mind upon, amidſt the *confuſion* and *perplexity* in which ignorant and artful men have involved the ſubject. And this, I truſt, will be both *uſeful* and *acceptable* to you, as it may help to *aſſiſt* and *guide* your underſtandings,

ſtandings, your affections and actions aright, and alſo give you quiet and peace of mind upon your ſo doing. But then, by this I expect to alarm the paſſions, and ſtir up the reſentment of two ſorts of people againſt me, namely, the *bigotted* and the *intereſted* in religion. By the bigotted, I mean thoſe who conſider themſelves in the *poſſeſſion of truth* antecedent to their enquiries about it; and this leads them zealouſly to contend for the *religious ſcheme* they have *imbibed*, whether it be Judaiſm, Mahometaniſm, Chriſtianity, Popery, Proteſtantiſm, or the like; upon a preſumption that they are defending truth, and oppoſing error thereby. By the intereſted in religion, I mean thoſe who make the *profeſſion* of religion *chiefly* ſubſervient to their *worldly intereſt*; this being a ſufficient ground to them to oppoſe every religious principle which ſtands in the way, or is any

way likely to thwart their preſent intereſt, and to ſupport and maintain any religious ſcheme which tends to ſupport and maintain them. From theſe quarters I expect to have it roundly aſſerted, that the following Enquiry is deſigned and calculated to *promote* and *encourage Deiſm*, to the *prejudice* of *Revealed Religion* in general, and of *Chriſtianity* in particular. If by Deiſm be meant the belief of a Deity, and the *governing* our minds and lives ſuitably to ſuch a belief, (which is ſtrictly and properly Deiſm) then, I readily acknowledge that *ſuch a charge* will be *juſt*, viz. that the following Enquiry is deſigned and calculated to promote and encourage Deiſm. But then, how this can be done in *prejudice* to Revealed Religion in general, and to Chriſtianity in particular, I am at a loſs to diſcover. Chriſtianity is (as it muſt needs be if it be of God) founded

on

on the *eternal reaſon* and *truth* of *things*; and therefore, it is impoſſible that reaſoning *juſtly* from *eternal truths*, (which is the caſe of the following Enquiry) can be prejudicial to Chriſtianity. And that Chriſtianity is founded on the eternal reaſon and truth of things, I have already ſhewed to be the caſe, by ſhewing what is the *True Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt*, in a book lately publiſhed bearing that title; which book hath drawn forth many oppoſers, who have employed their abilities in *perplexing* and *diſtreſſing* a ſubject which either they do not, or will not, or cannot, underſtand. The *true ground* upon which intelligent beings may reaſonably hope to obtain their Creator's favour, and upon which vicious beings may reaſonably hope and expect to obtain the divine mercy, are as *plain* and *obvious* as any thing in nature or reaſon can be. But then, in the preſent caſe, men *love*, or at leaſt

chuſe darkneſs rather than light; they chuſe to grope in the dark rather than attend to *that light* which is given to, and kindly intended to be a *guide* to every man that cometh into the world.

The repreſentation I have given of the Goſpel of Chriſt, in the forementioned book, is taken from the *words* and *declarations* of *Chriſt himſelf*, and is founded upon the *whole ſcope* and *purport* of *his miniſtry*. And, as in that view of the caſe the Goſpel of Chriſt appears to be grounded on *eternal reaſon* and *truth*, and ſtands clear of all that *abſurdity* and *nonſenſe* which ſome of it's preachers and pretended advocates have annexed to, and blended with it: ſo like pure gold it will bear being *tried* by the moſt *curious* and *artful refiner*. And, though the *perverting* Chriſt's Goſpel has been repreſented to be the *ground* of that *great oppoſition* which has been made to the forementioned book;

book; yet it may well be ſuſpected that there is *ſomething elſe* at the bottom. The appendixes of *pomp*, and *wealth*, and *power*, which are annexed to the *Chriſtian miniſtry*, theſe uſually awaken the *concern* of the *Clergy*, and were theſe to be *ſeparated* from that miniſtry, I fear the *poor Goſpel* would be left to *ſhift for itſelf* for any aid it would receive from theſe it's defenders. I have, in the book referred to, ſhewed how it comes to paſs that where the Goſpel has been received and profeſſed, it has not generally had it's proper and intended effect upon the minds and lives of men. And, amongſt *other cauſes*, I have ſhewed the *Chriſtian miniſtry* to have been *one*. And, tho' I offered nothing on that head of diſcourſe, but what plainly appeared to have been *grounded* on *experience* and *fact*; yet I have hereby ſtirred up the wrath and indignation of *many* of the *Clergy* againſt me,

two of which, who are my opponents, have taken upon them to be their profeſſed vindicators. This I apprehend to have been the *principal* ground of the forementioned oppoſition, which as it is no more than I expected; ſo thereby is made good an old proverb, *touch a galled horſe on the part that is galled, and it will wince.* And, here I beg leave to aſk thoſe reverend fathers, (my opponents) otherwiſe like his Holineſs *our ſervants* in *Chriſt Jeſus*; Who have been the *great corrupters* of Chriſtianity in all ages? Who gave birth to, nouriſhed up, and brought to perfection, that *great corruption* of Chriſtianity called *Popery?* Have they not been thoſe employed in the *Chriſtian miniſtry?* Yes certainly. This my reverend opponents muſt know to be the truth of the caſe, if they know any thing of the matter; and if they do not, then, ſurely, their *ignorance* bears ſome proportion to their *confidence*, the

the latter of which, it muſt be confeſſed, they are bleſſed with a *plentiful ſhare* of. When I repreſented the Chriſtian miniſtry as having been *injurious* to the Goſpel of Chriſt, I did not repreſent it to have been *univerſally*, but only *too generally* the caſe. There have been, I doubt not, many honeſt worthy good men employed in the Chriſtian miniſtry, who have laboured abundantly to render the Goſpel of Chriſt efficacious and ſucceſful upon the minds and lives of men; and this has been the caſe in all ages, in all countries, and perhaps amongſt all ſects and parties in the Chriſtian world; but then, taking all theſe into the account, what proportion there has been betwixt the *Fleetwood*'s and the *Sacheverell*'s, betwixt thoſe who have been *nurſing fathers* and thoſe who have been the *troublers* of our Iſrael, betwixt thoſe who have *fed* and thoſe who have *fleeced* the flock of Chriſt, I will

leave

leave to the determination of more capable judges.

One of theſe my opponents has been pleaſed to obſerve, (in the introductory part of his book) that what I, at ſeveral times, have offered to the world, one part is built upon another, and thus I go on to build; ſo that the anſwering *one* or *two* of my tracts anſwers the whole. Upon which I obſerve, that many of the ſubjects I have treated of are as *diſtinct* and *independent* as any ſubjects of moral conſideration can be; and therefore, there was no place for this author's idle remark. And what *point* he propoſed to *gain by it* I cannot conceive, except it was to let his readers ſee how very *inattentive* he could be to the ſubject he took upon him to examine, and that therefore, they ought not to be ſurpriſed if they found this to be the caſe through his whole book. However, I obſerve to this author, and to the

the reſt of my opponents, that I have laid down *two* or *three* principles which I have made the *ground* and *foundation* of argument; which principles if they are *deſtroyed*, then, *all* that I have built upon them muſt *fall* with them. But if they *cannot* be deſtroyed, as, I think, they cannot, then, what I have built upon them *muſt ſtand* in ſpite of all oppoſition; and that *Babel* of *confuſion* which my opponents are building, muſt, in point of argument, fall to the ground. The principles referred to are theſe *three*. *Firſt*, that there is a natural and an eſſential difference in things, and that one thing or action is diſtinct from, and really preferable to another in nature; *Secondly*, that there is a rule of action reſulting from that difference, which every moral agent ought in reaſon to govern his actions by; *Thirdly*, that God makes this rule the meaſure of his actions, in all inſtances and caſes

in

in which it can be a rule to him. Theſe are the *principles* I reaſon from, the deſtroying of which, deſtroys all that I have built upon them; whereas, if theſe are immovable, then, every thing juſtly grounded upon them muſt be immovable alſo. Here then, is a *ſhort* and *plain* way of anſwering me, though it is ſuch a way as my opponents will not be prevailed upon to come into. It is but to ſhew that the foremention-ed principles are *falſe*, and the work is done, I am confuted. But then, every thing *ſhort* of this, falls ſhort of an anſwer to me. This is what I have obſerved long before now, and perhaps my repeating it here, may give an occaſion to my acute and quick ſighted opponent to renew his remark, *viz.* that I ſtill go on to build one book upon another. It is no anſwer to me to advance doctrines barely grounded on the *figurative language* of the New

Teſtament, whether the New Teſtament was written by divine inſpiration or not; becauſe *figures of ſpeech* are not a proper foundation to build doctrines of *importance* upon, eſpecially when thoſe doctrines are plainly *repugnant* to the moſt plain and evident principles of reaſon, which is the preſent caſe.

But to return to my readers. Sirs, I beſeech you to be upon your *guard*, and examine carefully and attentively whatever is offered to your conſideration; becauſe, *now*, oppoſition is made from all quarters to thoſe truths that are of the utmoſt concern to your preſent and future well being. When the queſtion was put, *Who ſhall perſwade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one ſaid on this manner, and another ſaid on that manner. There came forth a ſpirit, and ſtood before the Lord, and ſaid, I will perſwade him. And the Lord ſaid unto him, Wherewith? And he ſaid, I*

who favourably beholdeth the upright in heart. It is the exerciſe of wiſdom, righteouſneſs, and goodneſs, in the creation and government of the world, which conſtitute the *beautiful character* of our heavenly Father; and it is the exerciſe of theſe, and theſe only, which conſtitute us his *beloved children*, and which render us *approvable* in his ſight; and every thing *beſide* theſe are *falſe* or *counterfeit coin*, as not having the ſtamp of *reaſon* and *truth* upon them. This is what I would leave upon your minds, as it is a matter of the utmoſt concern to you.

AN

ENQUIRY

INTO THE

GROUND and FOUNDATION

OF

RELIGION.

WHEN we behold the bold attempts, the dauntleſs courage, the indefatigable induſtry, the firm and unſhaken reſolution, the great attainments, the vaſt diſcoveries, the extenſive knowledge, the ſtrict fidelity, the impartial juſtice, the agreeable modeſty, temperance, and prudence, and, as it were, the boundleſs generoſity and benevolence, and the like, of ſome of our ſpecies, it gives one ſuch a *beautiful picture* of *human nature*, as very naturally leads one to think that man was *deſigned for*, and *prepared* to underſtand the moſt *ſublime* and *uſeful truths*, to undertake and execute the *beſt* and *moſt noble deſigns*, and to be governed by the *moſt perfect rule of action*. But alas! when we ſee this affair in another light, that is, when we behold the great indolence and

ſloth, the conſummate impudence and confidence, the groſs ignorance and ſtupidity, the great fickleneſs and inconſtancy, the amazing timorouſneſs and fearfulneſs, the moſt abominable rudeneſs, intemperance and debauchery, the moſt vile diſſimulation and falſhood, the terrible cruelty and barbarity, the great nigardlineſs and avarice, and other like exceſſes, and extravagancies of others of our ſpecies, it gives one ſuch a *diſagreeable view* of *human nature*, as almoſt tempts one to think that man was *deſigned*, and *conſtituted* to anſwer the *loweſt*, and *worſt* of *purpoſes*. And beſides theſe, there are a multitude of intermediate characters, if I may ſo ſpeak, which, with theſe, make up the whole of mankind. From whence then is this *great variety*, this *contrariety* of *characters*, which makes it look as if out of the ſame fountain proceeded waters both bitter and ſweet. This, ſurely, muſt be worth our enquiry. I ſhall not take upon me to give a full and complete account of this matter, but only, by way of eſſay, hint at *ſome* of the *grounds* and *cauſes* of this great variety, this contrariety of characters which take place in, and amongſt mankind.

The *firſt* and *primary cauſe* of all this, is *man's agency*. For, as man, is, in, and by his natural conſtitution a free being, who has it in his power, and it is left to his option whether he will rightly uſe, neglect, or abuſe the various abilities he is endowed with, and the various external things that are provided

for

for his uſe; and, as men have in fact more or leſs rightly uſed, neglected, or abuſed their own abilities, and thoſe external things that have come within their power; and thereby have rightly uſed, or abuſed their natural liberty: ſo *from hence has followed*, by a natural and unavoidable conſequence, that *great variety*, and *contrariety* of *characters* as aforeſaid.

But then, tho' man's agency has been the *firſt* and *chief cauſe*, of the various and different characters which have taken place amongſt mankind; yet there have been a great number of *ſecondary cauſes*, if I may ſo ſpeak, which have contributed greatly thereto. Thus, the great *variety* and *contrariety* of *tempers* and *conſtitutions* which have taken place in and amongſt men, by which one man is *more ſtrongly* inclined to *induſtry* than to *indolence*, another is *more ſtrongly* inclined to *indolence* than to *induſtry*; one man is *more ſtrongly* inclined to *benevolence* than to a *vicious ſelfiſhneſs*, another is *more ſtrongly* inclined to a *vicious ſelfiſhneſs* than to *benevolence*, and the like: Theſe have contributed greatly towards the forming mens characters as aforeſaid.

This, I think, has been, moſt apparently, the caſe in fact. For, tho' it may well be ſuppoſed that the *original pair* were *rightly conſtituted*; that is, that their conſtitutions were ſo poiſed or ballanced as that one part had not the aſcendant over another, excepting that one part which was deſigned to direct and govern the whole; I ſay, tho' it may well

be ſuppoſed that this was the caſe of our *firſt parents*, when they came out of their *Maker's* hand; yet it could not well be expected that it would be the caſe, nor has it been ſo in fact with their poſterity. The tempers and conſtitutions even of our *firſt parents* were liable to be *altered* and *changed*, by thoſe *various* and *different circumſtances* that were liable to attend them. Thus, their living in different climates, or their uſing too much, or too little exerciſe, or their eating or drinking too much, or too little, or their feeding upon improper food, of which, perhaps, for want of experience they might not have been very good judges, and the like, might have *impaired* the *health*, and *altered* the *tempers* and *conſtitutions* even of our *firſt parents* themſelves. And, if this was, or might have been the caſe of the *original pair*, then, what changes, what variety and contrariety of tempers and conſtitutions might juſtly have been expected would take place in their *numberleſs poſterity*; even ſuch as experience and fact has ſhewn them to be. For, as the circumſtances of mankind in general would of courſe be *greatly different* from that of our *firſt parents*; ſo that *difference* of circumſtances would introduce that *great variety* and *contrariety* of tempers and conſtitutions as we ſee at this day. And theſe have contributed much towards the introducing the different and contrary characters that have and do take place in and amongſt mankind. But then, theſe are only *ſecond cauſes*, if they may

be

be ſo called; becauſe, notwithſtanding mens tempers and conſtitutions every man has it in his power, and it is left to his option, with regard to his conduct, whether he will govern his natural inclinations, or be governed by them.

I have already obſerved, that I do not intend to enter fully into this queſtion, nor indeed do I think my ſelf capable of it; but only, by way of eſſay, to hint at *ſome* of the grounds or reaſons of that great variety and contrariety of characters that take place amongſt men; and therefore, I ſhall take notice but of one thing more which has contributed greatly towards the forming mens characters as aforeſaid, and that is *Religion.* For, as nothing has been more *different* and *contrary* than mens *religion*; ſo nothing has had more *different* and *contrary influence* upon mens *affections* and *actions.*

The word Religion is ſometimes uſed in a reſtrained ſenſe, and ſignifies only thoſe acts of *piety* and *devotion* by which men pay either their publick or their private acknowledgments to God; and in this ſenſe of the word Religion men are ſaid to be more or leſs *religious*, as they more or leſs *abound* in the uſe of theſe acts of *devotion*, or as they are more or leſs *zealous* with regard to them. The word Religion is alſo ſometimes uſed in a more extenſive ſenſe, and is made to ſignify *all thoſe things* by which men, *as men*, propoſe to obtain the *divine favour*; and by which men,

as

as ſinners, propoſe to obtain *God's mercy* and the *happineſs of another world*. And, whether the word Religion be taken in one ſenſe or the other, as it is *greatly different* and *contrary* with reſpect to the opinions of the multitude of mankind; ſo it has had a very *different*, and *ſometimes* a *contrary influence* upon their affections and actions. Alas! religion has been of ſuch weight in the preſent caſe, as that it has not only *over-ruled* and *controuled* the *underſtandings*, but alſo the *ſtrongeſt appetites* and *paſſions*, and the *moſt tender affections* of men. It has extorted *induſtry* from the moſt *indolent*, and *cruelty* from the moſt *tender* and *compaſſionate*. It has *baffled* the underſtandings of the *moſt diſcerning*, and made *weak* men *mad*. It has laid waſte cities, overturned kingdoms, and turned whole countries into fields of blood. It would, perhaps, be not only an entertaining, but alſo a uſeful performance were I to give my reader a clear view of the *great variety* and *contrariety* of *ſentiments* and *practices* with regard to religion which now take place in the ſeveral parts of the world, and which have taken place in all the ſeveral ages of it; and likewiſe ſhew my reader what *great variety* and *contrariety* of *effects* religion has had upon the affections and actions of men, but this, it may well be ſuppoſed, is greatly above my ability to perform. All that I can do is only to remind my reader of what comes, in ſome meaſure, within his own notice and obſervation, and by which he may

may form ſome probable opinion of the caſe. Chriſtians *all are*, or at leaſt they *all profeſs themſelves* to be *diſcipled* to one and the ſame *maſter*, and yet, notwithſtanding, there now is, and has been, (almoſt ever ſince Chriſtianity has had a being) *great variety* and *contrariety* of religious principles and practices amongſt them; and theſe have had *different* and *oppoſite* influence upon their affections and actions. This has been ſo notoriouſly the caſe in fact, that it would fill a volume to enumerate the *various* and *contrary* religious ſentiments that have been imbibed, and zealouſly contended for by Chriſtians; the *great variety* and *contrariety* of religious practices that have prevailed amongſt them; and the *various* and *contrary events* that have been occaſioned by theſe. This, as I ſaid before, muſt in ſome meaſure have come within my reader's own notice and obſervation, and therefore, needs no exemplification. If therefore, the *religion* of *Chriſtians*, (who value themſelves upon that much *greater* and *clearer light*, and much *ſafer guidance* vouchſafed to them, by *their religion*, than any other part of mankind partake of,) has been, and ſtill is *ſo various* and *contradictory*, and if the *preſent happineſs* and *miſery* of *mankind* has been, and ſtill is greatly affected by the *religion* of *Chriſtians*, as the experience of this age, as well as many ages that are paſt, have abundantly ſhewn it to be; then, what may we expect, or rather what may we not expect from the *religions* of *all* thoſe other

parts

parts of mankind who *neither have, nor have had* the advantage of that much *greater light* and *ſafer guidance* to boaſt of? From what I have obſerved, I think, it plainly appears, that *religion* has had a *great hand*, (if I may ſo ſpeak) in *forming* the various and different characters of men.

If then, the *religion* of *mankind in general* has been, and ſtill is ſo *various* and *contradictory*, as in fact it has appeared, and ſtill appears to be; and if the *religion* of *Chriſtians*, (which comes more within our own notice and obſervation, and with reſpect to which Chriſtians think they have ſufficient proof that it came from God,) is ſo *confuſed* and *contradictory* as experience and fact has ſhewn, and ſtill ſhews it to be; and if the *preſent happineſs* and *miſery* of mankind has been, and ſtill is greatly affected by the *various* and *oppoſite religions* that have, and do prevail in the world, which moſt certainly is the truth of the caſe; then, from hence we are naturally, and almoſt unavoidably led to another enquiry, *viz.* whether *religion* has any *ſolid foundation in nature*; that is, whether there be in reality a *right* and *wrong*, a *true* and *falſe religion in nature*; and conſequently, whether there be any *certain obvious principles* in *nature* or *reaſon* by which a man may *diſtinguiſh* theſe, and form a *proper judgment* in the preſent caſe, and which an honeſt upright man may *ſafely* and *ſecurely* ſtay his mind upon.

And,

And, that this queſtion may be throughly diſcuſſed, I think, it will be proper in the *firſt* place to ſuppoſe that Religion has *no* foundation in nature; and then enquire how the caſe will ſtand upon that ſuppoſition. By Religion's having *no* foundation in nature, I mean that in reality there is no *natural difference* in *actions* or *things*; that is, that one thing or action is not preferable to another in nature; that no action *does of itſelf* render the agent the proper object of the divine approbation or diſlike, of the divine favour or diſpleaſure; and conſequently, that no action or thing is of itſelf, and in it's own nature, *religious* or *irreligious*; that man *is not*, in the nature of the thing, an *accountable creature*; and that there is *no foundation in nature* for a future judgment and retribution.

If Religion has no foundation in nature, which is the preſent ſuppoſition, then, it muſt be either a *creature* of *man's production*; that is, it muſt be founded only on the *opinions* and *fancies*, or on the *cunning* and *craftineſs* of *men*; or elſe it muſt be the *creature* of ſome *inviſible agent*, or *agents*, *not divine*; that is, it muſt have been introduced into the world by the interpoſition of ſome *inviſible agent*, or *agents*, who is not, nor are they *that being* whom we characteriſe by the term *God*; or elſe laſtly, it muſt be founded only on the *ſovereign pleaſure* and *arbitrary will* of *God*; theſe being, I think, all the ways by which Religion could have been brought into being,

 ſuppoſing

ſuppoſing it to have no foundation in nature. And,

Firſt, if we conſider Religion as a creature of *man's production*, and that it has no other foundation than on the *opinions* and *fancies*, or on the *cunning* and *craftineſs* of *men*, then, that *great variety* and *contrariety* of religious ſentiments and practices which have taken place in the world is not to be wondered at; becauſe then, it might well have been expected that mens religions would be as *greatly various* and *oppoſite* as the different meaſures of their underſtandings, their different paſſions and fancies, and as their various and oppoſite intereſts ſhould *incline* or *direct*. And tho', in this view of the caſe, there would be in reality no ſuch thing as true and falſe Religion, becauſe all Religions would be true and falſe alike; yet thoſe Religions would have the appearance of being true or falſe to every man, as his opinion or fancy led him to eſteem them to be either. And tho' mens religion might have been *ſubſervient* to their preſent happineſs or miſery; yet it could not *affect them* with regard to futurity; becauſe it muſt then be the ſame to a man with regard to God's favour and diſpleaſure, and with regard to a man's happineſs or miſery in another world, whether he be of *this*, or *that religion*, or whether he be of *any*, or *no religion*. But this ſuppoſition, I think, is not admitted by the Religioniſts of any ſect or party whatever, each party preſuming that they have arguments and reaſons

proper

proper and *ſufficient* to ground their reſpective religious principles and practices upon; and conſequently, they do not admit that their Religion is founded only on *opinion* as aforeſaid. Again,

If we ſuppoſe *Religion* to be the production of ſome *inviſible agent*, or *agents*, *not divine*, the caſe will not be greatly different from what it was upon the former ſuppoſition. I introduce this ſuppoſition, becauſe it is interwoven with the ſchemes of moſt Religioniſts, who admit that inviſible agents not divine, *have*, and *do operate* upon this globe, and *do intereſt themſelves* in the affairs of Religion; which inviſible agents are uſually characteriſed by thoſe terms Demons, Angels, Devils, and the like. And tho' it is not admitted that theſe inviſible agents, or any one of them is the *founder*, or *founders* of true Religion; yet moſt Religioniſts readily admit that the *Devil*, ſome way or other, has had *a hand* in the *introduction* of all falſe Religions. And, as upon the preſent ſuppoſition, there is no ſuch thing as right and wrong in nature; ſo it can be neither right nor wrong for inviſible agents to interpoſe and intereſt themſelves in human affairs; and therefore, one would think, it muſt be mere *wantonneſs* in them which muſt be the *ground* of ſuch interpoſition. And, this accounts for that *great variety* and *contrariety* of religious principles and practices which have taken place in the world; as theſe may well be ſuppoſed to bear a proportion to the *number* of ſuch,

inviſible agents as have been concerned, or to that *wanton fancy* they may have indulged herein. And tho', upon the preſent ſuppoſition as upon the former, there will be no ſuch thing as true and falſe Religion; yet every man's Religion will appear true to himſelf, and all other Religions will appear to him to be falſe, according as thoſe *arguments*, by which his judgment is directed, appear to him to be *concluſive*, or *otherwiſe*. And tho', upon the preſent ſuppoſition, a man's Religion, let it be what it will, cannot affect him with regard to God's favour and the happineſs of another world; yet it may very much affect himſelf and others with regard to their happineſs or miſery in this, as it may engage him more or leſs to *purſue*, or *neglect* the one or the other. And,

Upon the preſent ſuppoſition, *a queſtion* or *two* will naturally ariſe, *viz. how*, or in *what way*, inviſible agents not divine can become the founders of Religion to mankind? And what *kind of evidence* they can produce to engage mens attention to, and belief of, it? As to the *firſt* of theſe queſtions the anſwer is *eaſy*, if we admit a ſuppoſition which is admitted into the ſchemes of moſt Religioniſts, *viz.* that inviſible agents not divine, *can*, and *do impreſs various* and *contrary images* upon the minds of men. And, if this be admitted, then, we may eaſily perceive, not only that ſuch agents have it in their power to become the *founders* of Religion to mankind; but alſo in what *way* they

they are capable of doing it. It is but to *impreſs* upon the mind of a man a *ſet* of religious principles, and *point out* to him a *ſet* of religious practices, by ſuch impreſſions, and then a religion is *coined* for *that man*, and for *all* that ſhall be *diſcipled* to him. And,

As to the other queſtion, *viz.* what kind of evidence inviſible agents not divine can produce to engage mens attention to, and belief of, thoſe religious impreſſions that are made upon their minds; the anſwer to this queſtion will not be hard nor difficult, if we admit a ſuppoſition which is likewiſe uſually admitted into the ſchemes of moſt Religioniſts, namely, that ſuch inviſible agents do not only impreſs various and contrary images upon the minds of men, but alſo that they *do otherwiſe operate*, or uſe their power, upon this globe. But before I proceed to anſwer this queſtion, *two* things muſt be premiſed, *viz. firſt*, if the actions of free beings are *foreknowable in nature*, (which point is admitted by moſt Religioniſts) then, thoſe actions *may be* foreknowable, not only to the *Deity*, but alſo to *ſome other* inviſible agents not divine. For, as knowledge is communicable; ſo foreknowledge may be communicable alſo. That is, as creatures are ſo formed that they can attain knowledge by the exerciſe of *thoſe powers* which reſult from their natural conſtitutions; ſo foreknowledge may be attainable in the *ſame way*; I ſay, this may be the caſe for any thing we know or can ſhew to the contrary.

However,

However, this is apparent that the *knowledge* and *ſagacity* which reſults from the *conſtitutions* of various animals is *greatly different*, as the knowledge and ſagacity of a *man* is greatly ſuperior to that of an *aſs*. And, this *may be the caſe* of inviſible agents not divine. And therefore, tho' men may not be able certainly to diſcover and foreknow the actions of each other, and other events that are dependent on ſuch actions; yet it will by no means follow from thence, that ſuch diſcovery and foreknowledge cannot reſult from the natural conſtitutions of any inviſible agents not divine. Again, *Secondly*, if inviſible agents not divine *can*, and *do operate*, or exerciſe their power on this globe, (which propoſition is admitted by many Religioniſts,) then, there is no operation on this globe, tho' ever ſo much above the natural ability or inherent power of man, but *may be performed* by the power of ſome inviſible agent not divine. I ſay, this may be the caſe for any thing we know or can ſhew to the contrary. For, as power is communicable; ſo it is *equally as eaſy* for God to communicate one kind, or degree of power as another; at leaſt it is ſo for any thing we know, and to ſuppoſe the contrary is plainly a *limitation* of God's power. Beſides, there are *various kinds* and *degrees* of power, which *reſult* from the natural conſtitutions of the inhabitants of this globe, and this may likewiſe be the caſe of inviſible agents not divine. And, this accounts for *Moſes's conteſt with*, and

victory

victory over, the Magicians of *Egypt*. The *power* of the inviſible being, or beings who aſſiſted *Moſes*, was *much greater* than the *power* of thoſe inviſible beings who aſſiſted the Magicians; and thereby, *Moſes*, in point of *miracle working*, became greatly their ſuperior. Theſe points being premiſed, I return to the queſtion propoſed, *viz.* what kind of evidence inviſible agents not divine can produce to engage mens attention to, and belief of thoſe religious impreſſions that are made upon their minds? And the anſwer to this queſtion, (admitting the above ſuppoſitions) is ſhort, plain, and obvious, namely, they have had, or may have had, Oracles, Prophecies, Prodigies, Miracles, *&c.* to anſwer theſe purpoſes. This is the caſe ſuppoſing Religion to be the *creature* of ſome inviſible agent, or agents, not divine.

Thus I have ſhewn how the caſe will ſtand, whether we conſider Religion as founded only on the opinions and fancies, or on the cunning and craftineſs of men; or whether it has been introduced into the world by the interpoſition of ſome inviſible agent, or agents, not divine. And, I fear, the caſe will not be much mended, if we conſider it as founded only on the *abſolute ſovereignty* and *arbitrary will* of *God*, which is the point that comes next under conſideration. Abſolute ſovereignty and mere will has *no rule* to act by, and has nothing but mere *capricious humour* for it's *guide*; and if we conſider the Deity as under no other direction

direction but this, then, the affair of Religion muſt be a moſt *wild* and *extravagant* thing. Then, what is conſtituted *religion to-day*, may be turned into *irreligion to-morrow*; what is made to be *virtue* in one *place*, may be made to be *vice* in *another*. Then, *charity* may be made rewardable in *one people*, and *cruelty* rewardable in *another*. Then, *diſſimulation* and *fraud* may be made puniſhable at *one time*, and *integrity* and *juſtice* puniſhable at *another*. And tho', upon this ſuppoſition *true Religion*, if the term may be admitted, *is of God*; yet every man would be under the utmoſt *uncertainty* what is true Religion; becauſe he has nothing to guide him in the enquiry, nor no rule by which he can judge what Religion is of God, and what is not.

As to the *principles* and *practices* of any Religion, theſe can no way aſſiſt us in forming a judgment, whether any *particular Religion* be of God, or not. For, as upon the preſent ſuppoſition, there is no ſuch thing as right and wrong in nature; ſo any one thing whatever muſt be as *agreeable* to capricious humour, and as *likely* to be choſen by ſovereign and arbitrary will as any other thing. Upon the preſent ſuppoſition, truth and falſhood, mercy and cruelty, honeſty and diſhoneſty, are upon a *level*, one being as *eligible*, and as *fit* to be *choſen* or *recommended* as another. And, as the internal characters of any Religion cannot poſſibly afford an *argument* in *favour* of it's divine original; ſo neither can they poſſibly

afford

afford any *objection againſt it*; and conſequently, every man muſt be under the utmoſt *uncertainty*, whether the Religion he adheres to be of God, or not. And therefore, to raiſe an argument either for, or againſt the divine original of any Religion from the perfections of the Deity, would be greatly abſurd; becauſe, upon the preſent ſuppoſition, there is no ſuch thing as perfection or imperfection in nature. And,

As to any *external evidence* which may be ſuppoſed to attend any Religion, ſuch as Propheſies, Miracles, *&c.* theſe can afford no light in the preſent caſe. I have already obſerved that as knowledge is communicable; ſo foreknowledge may be communicable alſo; and that as to power, it is equally as eaſy for God to communicate one kind or degree of power, as another; I ſay, this is, or may be the caſe for any thing we know or can ſhew to the contrary; and conſequently, there is no *propheſy* nor *miracle* which takes place among men but *may be* produced by the operation of ſome inviſible agent not divine. Now, if this *may be* the caſe, of which no one can *prove* the *contrary*; then, no external evidence whatever can poſſibly prove any Religion to be of God; becauſe ſuch evidence *may be* produced, not by the operation of God, but of ſome other inviſible agent not divine. And, were we to *preſume* that ſuch evidences are of God, it would not help the caſe; becauſe, upon the preſent ſuppoſition, God

might, *conſiſtent* with his own *character* as an abſolute and arbitrary governour of the world, deceive us himſelf, as well as leave us in the hands of other deceivers. So that admitting Religion to be founded only on the arbitrary will of God, it would be the moſt *uncertain* and *precarious* thing in the world. And ſuppoſing we could come to a *certainty* with reſpect to it; yet it could afford *no ſolid grounds* of peace, comfort, or ſafety, to mankind; becauſe *arbitrary will* may *ſet aſide* all *promiſes* and *engagements*, and *annex* the *ſevereſt pains* and *penalties* even to the ſtricteſt duty and obedience. And

Tho', upon the preſent ſuppoſition, there is no ſuch thing as right and wrong, as true and falſe Religion in nature; yet as a *ſenſe* of right and wrong is ſo *deeply rooted* in the minds of moſt men that it becomes a kind of *firſt principle* to them; ſo it will *influence* their affections and actions, it will *greatly perplex* and *diſtreſs* their minds, and will lay a *foundation* for endleſs diſputes and controverſies in matters of religion.

Thus, I have taken a view of the caſe ſuppoſing Religion to have no foundation in nature, but to be founded only on the opinions and fancies, or on the cunning and craftineſs of men; or elſe to be the creature of ſome inviſible agent, or agents, not divine; or elſe to be founded only on the abſolute ſovereignty and arbitrary will of God; theſe being, I think, all the poſſible ways in, and by which

religion could have been introduced into the world, ſuppoſing it to have no foundation in nature. I come now to the queſtion before mentioned, *viz.* whether *Religion* has any *ſolid foundation* in nature; that is, whether there be in reality a *right* and *wrong*, a *true* and *falſe Religion* in nature; and conſequently, whether there be any *certain obvious principles* in nature or reaſon by which a man may *diſtinguiſh* theſe, and form a *proper judgment* in the preſent caſe, and which an honeſt upright man may *ſafely* and *ſecurely* ſtay his mind upon.

I have already obſerved that the word Religion is ſometimes uſed in a reſtrained ſenſe, and is made to ſignify *all* thoſe acts of *piety* and *devotion* by which men pay either their publick or their private acknowledgments to God. And, that the word Religion is alſo ſometimes uſed in a more extenſive ſenſe, and is made to ſignify, either all thoſe things by which men, *as men*, propoſe to obtain the divine favour; or elſe all thoſe things by which men, *as ſinners*, propoſe to obtain God's mercy and the happineſs of another world. And according to this the enquiry is *threefold*, *viz. Firſt*, whether *piety* has any *foundation* in nature, and what it is that nature *points out* to men with reſpect to it. *Secondly*, whether the *grounds* of mens acceptance with God is alſo *founded* in nature. *Thirdly* and laſtly, when men by their miſbehaviour have rendered themſelves greatly

diſpleaſing to the Deity; then, whether there is any thing in nature which can render them the *proper objects* of God's mercy and kindneſs, and conſequently, will be the *ground* of the divine mercy to them.

And, that I may be both *clear* and *full* upon this queſtion, I will *firſt* ſhew that there is a *natural* and an *eſſential difference* in things, and that one thing or action is really *better* or *preferable* to another in nature; *ſecondly*, that there is a *rule* of *action* reſulting from that difference, which every moral agent *ought in reaſon* to govern his behaviour by; and *thirdly*, that God makes *this rule* the *meaſure* of his actions in all his dealings with his creatures. From which it will follow that *ſome actions* are in their *own nature* juſtly approvable, and *others* juſtly condemnable; that *ſome actions* render the performing agent the *ſuitable* and *proper object* of approbation and affection, and that *other actions* render the agent the *proper object* of diſlike and reſentment; that *man*, in the nature of the thing, is an *accountable* creature; and that there is in nature a *juſt foundation* for a future judgment and retribution. And, then, I will apply this to the point in queſtion. And, here I ſhall have little elſe to do than to tranſcribe what I have already written upon the ſubject, that being full to my purpoſe.

* Firſt,

* Firſt, I am to ſhew that there is a *natural* and *an eſſential difference* in things; by which I mean, *firſt*, that there is not an *univerſal ſameneſs* in nature, but that *things* and *actions* are really *diſtinct* and *different* from each other. That is to ſay, pleaſure and pain, two and four, right and wrong, kind and unkind, are not the *ſame thing*; but thoſe *different terms* are uſed to expreſs, and do convey to the mind *ideas* which are really *diſtinct* and *different* in nature. Pleaſure is not the *ſame thing* as pain, two is not the *ſame* as four, right is not the *ſame* as wrong, kind is not the *ſame* as unkind, and the like. Again, when I ſay there is a natural and an eſſential difference in things, I mean *ſecondly*, that there is not an *univerſal indifference* in nature, but that *things* and *actions* are really one *better* or *preferable* to another. That is to ſay, pleaſure is in nature, (when conſidered abſtractedly from all other conſiderations,) *better* than pain; right is *better* than wrong; kind is *better* than unkind; and the like. And our diſcerning faculties do as naturally and as evidently perceive the *difference* betwixt theſe, with reſpect to their *preferableneſs* one to another, as thoſe faculties do diſcern their *differing* one from another. That is, we do as naturally and as evidently perceive that pleaſure *is better* than pain, as that pleaſure *is not* pain; we do as naturally and evidently perceive that doing

* See my Diſcourſe intitled, *The Sufficiency of Reaſon in Matters of Religion farther conſidered.*

doing right is *better* or *preferable* to doing wrong, as we perceive that right is not the *ſame thing* as wrong; that to do right is *commendable* and worthy of a rational being, and therefore, ought in reaſon to determine his choice in it's favour; and to do wrong is *diſreputable* and unworthy of a rational being, and therefore, his choice ought always in reaſon to be determined againſt it; and the like. And,

Tho' our reaſoning faculty is abſolutely neceſſary for the diſcovering the natural and eſſential difference in things, or to enable us to perceive it; yet this faculty *does not make* or *conſtitute* that *difference*. Things and actions are really diſtinct from, and one preferable to another, when conſidered *abſtractedly from*, and *independent* of any power in us; and our diſcerning faculty does only enable us to *perceive*, but does not *conſtitute* that difference. So that the difference in things does not *reſult from*, nor *depend* upon, any particular conſtitution of the mind, but is founded in *nature*, and therefore will appear the *ſame* to all minds, in which a capacity of diſcernment reſides, tho' *differently* conſtituted. Two and four are really *diſtinct* and *different* in nature, and this difference muſt and will appear *the ſame* to *every mind* in which a capacity of diſcernment reſides, tho' differently conſtituted. Thus again, pleaſure is *in nature* better and preferable to pain, and this difference muſt and will appear *the ſame* to *every mind*, (however

(however conſtituted) which is capable of perceiving what pleaſure and pain is. The caſe is the ſame with reſpect to right and wrong, kind and unkind, and the like; theſe are not only different from, but alſo one preferable to another in nature; and our faculties do not conſtitute that difference, but only enable us to perceive it. And, as there is not an *univerſal ſameneſs* in *nature*, but a real difference with reſpect to things and actions themſelves; and, as there is not an *univerſal indifference* in *nature*, but a real difference with reſpect to the *valuableneſs* or *preferableneſs* of one thing or action to another, when they are brought into a compariſon: ſo that difference, in all *ſimple* (tho' it be otherwiſe in complex) caſes is the object of *ſimple perception only*, and as ſuch thoſe prove themſelves; that is, they *appear evident* to our *preceptive faculty*, and do not admit of any other kind of proof. If it ſhould be aſked, how can it be proved that two and two are equal to four? that the whole is equal to all it's parts? that acting right is *different* from, and *preferable* to acting wrong? and the like; the anſwer would be, that theſe are ſelf-evident propoſitions, that is, they appear evident to our diſcerning faculties, and as ſuch they prove themſelves, and do not admit of any other kind of proof. Again,

Secondly, as there is a natural and an eſſential difference in things; ſo that difference exhibits, if I may ſo ſpeak, a *reaſon* or *rule of action* to every moral agent. That is, as doing

doing right is in nature better, and therefore, preferable to doing wrong; ſo this difference will always be a *reaſon*, (reſulting from the nature of things) to every moral agent, why he *ſhould chuſe* to do right, and will be a *reaſon* againſt, or why he *ſhould not* chuſe to do wrong. Again, as pleaſure is in nature preferable to pain, the one being a natural good, the other a natural evil; ſo that difference affords a *reaſon* to every moral agent, to *chuſe* to taſte pleaſure himſelf, and to *chuſe* to communicate pleaſure to others; and it likewiſe affords a *reaſon* why he ſhould *chuſe* to avoid pain himſelf, and *chuſe* to avoid communicating pain to others, when theſe are conſidered abſtractedly from all other conſiderations. And, as there is a reaſon founded in nature for acting right, and a reaſon againſt acting wrong, a reaſon for communicating pleaſure, and a reaſon againſt communicating pain; ſo to act *agreeably to reaſon*, in doing the former is what conſtitutes *moral good*, and to act *againſt* the *reaſon* of the thing in doing the latter, is what conſtitutes *moral evil*; moral good and evil in every inſtance being nothing elſe but the acting *agreeably with*, or *contrary* to that *reaſon* or *rule of action* which is founded in, and reſults from the natural and eſſential difference in things; and all *moral obligations* are nothing elſe but the reaſon *reſulting* from that difference why we ſhould chuſe to act *this way*, or *that way*, rather than *their contraries*. And, as thoſe reaſons for acting one way rather than another

another are founded in nature, that is, they reſult from the natural and eſſential difference in things; ſo they become a rule of action, which is equally obliging, to *all* intelligent beings capable of diſcerning that difference. And conſequently, (in this ſenſe of the word *oblige*,) God, as he is a *moral agent*, is in reaſon obliged to govern his actions by this rule. And,

As there is a reaſon or rule of action which is equally obliging to every moral agent; ſo from hence it will follow that the *reaſonableneſs* of an action ought to determine the will of *every rational being*, to the performance of that action, even tho' there be no other motive to it, and tho' there be a *thouſand* temptations to excite to the contrary. For, whilſt, (when all things are taken into the caſe,) it is *reaſonable* that an action ſhould be performed, it is impoſſible that any, even the ſtrongeſt temptations, (how many ſo ever they be,) ſhould make it reaſonable to *omit* that action; becauſe if that were the caſe, then, under theſe circumſtances, it would not be a reaſonable, or at leaſt an indifferent, but an *unreaſonable* action, and as ſuch it does not come into the preſent queſtion, except we can ſuppoſe an action to be both reaſonable and unreaſonable or indifferent at the ſame time, and under the ſame circumſtances, which is a manifeſt contradiction. So that to ſuppoſe ſome *other* motives ſhould take place, beſides the reaſonableneſs of an action, which may be more

than a ballance to the many, and ſtrong temptations, with which a reaſonable creature may be ſurrounded, in order to engage his will for the choice of that action, and without which motives, the bare reaſonableneſs of an action would not be more than a ballance to thoſe temptations, is exceedingly wrong; becauſe the reaſonableneſs of an action is *in itſelf*, when conſidered abſtractedly from all other motives, more than a ballance to all temptations, for otherwiſe it would not be a reaſonable action. —— And it is a man's not following his *reaſon* in oppoſition to all temptations which renders him *juſtly* condemnable to *himſelf*, and to *every other* reaſonable being, and conſequently, to his *Maker* as ſuch. And, here I beg leave to obſerve to my reader, that the preſent queſtion is, what *ought in reaſon* to determine the will of a being endowed with a reaſoning faculty to the performance of a reaſonable action, and not what is *in fact* ſufficient for that purpoſe. And here, I ſay, that the *reaſonableneſs* of an action ought in reaſon to determine the will of every ſuch being for the choice of that action, but then it depends upon the *pleaſure* of each individual whether it ſhall, in fact, be ſufficient for this purpoſe, or not. And, this is the caſe of all other motives which may be ſuperadded, it depends upon the pleaſure of each individual whether, *in fact*, thoſe motives *ſhall be* to him the ground or reaſon of action, or not. And therefore, we ſee, not only the unreaſonable-

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neſs of an action, but all other motives that may be added to it, *viz.* the hopes and fears of this world, and the hopes and fears of the world to come, are not ſufficient, in fact, to *reſtrain* ſome men from unreaſonable actions.

And, as there is a reaſon or rule of action reſulting from the natural and eſſential differences in things; ſo this rule is, in common language, called the *law* of *nature*. It is alſo called the *law* of * *God*, as it is *that rule* by which God governs his behaviour towards his creatures. And it is God's law as he *adopts* it and makes it his, by giving it as a rule of action to his ſubjects, (he being the great governor of the moral world,) all God's laws being founded upon it, and conformed to it. But it is *not* God's law as founded ſolely on his *will* and *commandment*, becauſe it *is*, and *ought* to be a rule of action to *all intelligent beings*, whether God willed or commanded it, or not. And, this law of nature is in order of nature *above* and *before* all other laws, it being the ground and foundation of them; all law and government whether *human* or *divine* being originally founded, not in a ſuperiority of power, but in the reaſon of things as aforeſaid. And, as government itſelf is founded in the reaſon of things; ſo all *authority*, and all *laws* flowing from it ought to be directed and governed by this original and primary law of nature. It being a manifeſt

 abſurdity

* See my Tract intitled, *A Diſcourſe concerning Reaſon with regard to Religion and Divine Revelation.*

abſurdity to ſuppoſe that any law-giver can in *reaſon* have a *right* to command what is not fit nor reaſonable to be commanded, and which has not a laudable reaſon for it's performance, that of it's being commanded not being ſuch. And this is manifeſtly the caſe, with reſpect to all laws, and all law-givers, whether *human* or *divine*. It being equally as *unreaſonable* and *unfit* that God ſhould make an unreaſonable law, as that any other law-giver ſhould act thus; ſeeing the reaſon of things is, and ought to be as much a rule of action to him, as to any other intelligent being. God indeed is our creator, and as he called us into being without our conſent; ſo hereby he became our common parent, and the natural guardian of our happineſs, and hereby he has a *right* to govern us, not by making what law he pleaſes, but only to rule us for our *good*, it being very *unequal* and *unreaſonable* that he ſhould exerciſe *any other* authority over us; ſeeing his calling us into being, or his being poſſeſſed with ſuch power as we are not able to reſiſt, does not *alter* the nature of things, by making that *fit* and *reaſonable* which otherwiſe would not be ſo. And,

As this rule of action is founded in the reaſon of things; ſo our *obligation* to obedience is founded on the ſame principle. That is, we are in *reaſon* obliged to yeild obedience to this law ſuppoſing no promulged law had ever been given to mankind. Thus, the grateful acknow-

acknowledgment of a favour received, and a grateful return for it, to proper perſons, and under proper circumſtances, (when, and where ſuch returns can be made,) are duties which every intelligent being is in *reaſon* obliged to perform, when conſidered abſtractedly from, and antecedent to, any promulged law of any kind. For whatever in *reaſon* becomes a law to intelligent beings, thoſe beings, will for the *ſame reaſon* be obliged to yeild obedience to that law. And where there is no reaſon for a command, there can be no reaſon for our complying with it, except it be that *prudential* one of avoiding the evil, which otherwiſe our diſobedience may bring upon us. And this is the caſe of all laws, whether human or divine. That is, our obligation to obedience in any caſe, does not ariſe from the thing's being commanded, but from it's being *fit* and *reaſonable*, upon ſome account or other, when all things are taken into the caſe, (and when conſidered abſtractedly from the will of the law-giver,) that we ſhould yeild obedience to that law. For, as the reaſon of things is the ground and foundation of all *authority* and *government*; ſo it muſt likewiſe, in the nature of the thing, be the ground and foundation of all *obligations* to obedience. And,

As there is ſuch a *rule of action* founded in the nature of things as aforeſaid; ſo the *moral* perfections of all intelligent beings ariſe from, and conſiſt in, their being *perfectly* ſubjected to

to this law. Thus, the *moral* perfection of the *Deity* conſiſts in his being *abſolutely* and *perfectly* ſubjected to this law of reaſon; that is, in his making the reaſon of things the *rule* and *meaſure* of his affections and actions, in all his dealings with his creatures. And, herein conſiſts the *moral* perfection of the *human nature*, (when ſuch perfection is attained,) *viz.* in being *perfectly ſubjected* both in *affections* and *actions*, to this law of reaſon; and every approach to it is an approach to the perfection of our nature. And, if our ſpecies were *univerſally* and *perfectly* ſubjected to this law, then there would be no uſe nor place for any *promulged* law of any kind; becauſe the *uſe* and *end* of all promulged law and government, whether human or divine, is, (or at leaſt ought to be,) to enforce and lead men on to *obedience* to this original and primary law of nature again.

* Thirdly, as there is a natural and an eſſential difference in things, and as there is a rule of action reſulting from that difference which is equally obliging to every moral agent; ſo Almighty God makes that rule, *viz.* the reaſon of things, the meaſure of his actions; and this he does in all inſtances and caſes in which it is capable of being a rule to him. —— And, that this is a *true principle*, and a *proper foundation* for argument I prove thus. Almighty God is preſent to, and in, and with, all

* See my Diſcourſe intitled, *The Sufficiency of Reaſon in Matters of Religion farther conſidered.*

all things, and thereby has the moſt perfect knowledge of them. And, as he moſt clearly diſcerns the natural and eſſential difference in things, and the reaſon or rule of action reſulting from it in every caſe, and, as this is and ought to be as much a rule of action to God as to any other moral agent, and, as he is far above and thereby perfectly free from all temptations which might miſlead him and draw him into a wrong choice, ſo this affords a *moral certainty* that he will always chuſe to act right, or agreeably to that rule of action, which is founded in the reaſon of things as aforeſaid. For, tho' we may have different, and ſometimes oppoſite intereſts in view, and are ſurrounded with many temptations of various kinds to invite us to a wrong choice, and which too often is the ground and reaſon of our fooliſhly and wickedly acting contrary to that rule of action, which is founded in the reaſon of things; yet this is by no means the caſe with reſpect to God; and therefore, it cannot be a ground or reaſon to him to chuſe to act wrong in any caſe whatſoever. God has not different and oppoſite intereſts in view, he has no wrong affections within to miſlead, no temptations from without to intice and allure him, no pleaſing proſpect to invite, nor any ſuperior power to threaten and awe him; in fine, nature does not afford a *motive* to excite him to a *wrong choice*, and therefore, we are ſure that he never will act ſo; but on the contrary he *always will* make the

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reaſon of things the rule and meaſure of his actions.

But farther, * legiſlature or authority is either *natural* or *derived*, that is, it is a power or truſt which either reſults from that *natural relation* which one intelligent being ſtands in to another, or others; or elſe it is a power *committed in truſt* to ſome perſon, or perſons, to make laws for the good and benefit of thoſe who are ſubjected to that juriſdiction. The *former* of theſe is the caſe of *parents*, from whoſe *relation* to their *children* naturally ariſes a right, or reſults a truſt, to make ſuch laws for, and give ſuch rules of action to, them, as are for their and others good, juſt as the circumſtances and the reaſon of things ſhall require. And this is the caſe with reſpect to *God* and his *intelligent creatures*, he is their *common parent*, to whom they owe their exiſtence in a much higher ſenſe, than children do to their parents, and from whoſe *relation* to his *creatures* naturally ariſes a right, or reſults a truſt, to make ſuch laws, or lay down ſuch rules of action, as are for the good of thoſe to whom they are given, or for the good of the whole, juſt as the circumſtances and the reaſon of things ſhall require. The *latter* of theſe is the caſe of thoſe to whom legiſlative power is committed in truſt, and theſe are the *Civil Magiſtrates*, who are intruſted with power

* See my Anſwer to Mr *Stone*'s Remarks, upon the caſe of *Abraham*, with regard to his being commanded by God to offer up his ſon *Iſaac* in ſacrifice.

power to make laws for the ſociety's good, and to anſwer the purpoſes of civil aſſociation, juſt as the circumſtances and the reaſon of things ſhall require. And,

Here it is to be obſerved, that natural legiſlature or authority is not the natural offſpring of *power*, but of *paternity*. God does not become a *governor* to the intelligent and moral world by his being poſſeſſed with *Almighty power*, but by his being a *common parent* to his creatures. For, as he called them into being without their conſent; ſo reaſon requires that he ſhould take care of their *well being*, which it is the buſineſs of *government* to ſecure, and it is this which conſtitutes him our guardian or governor. God's being poſſeſſed with great and uncontroulable power enables him to play the *tyrant* over us, (were he diſpoſed to uſe his power to ſo vile a purpoſe) but it does not inveſt him with a *right* to be our guardian or governor, that being the reſult of his *relation* to us. And, this is the caſe of *parents* with reſpect to their children, their *authority* over them is not the natural offſpring of *power*, but it naturally ariſes from that *natural relation* they ſtand in to them. And, indeed, in a ſecundary and leſs proper ſenſe, this is the caſe in *civil ſociety*, where legiſlative power is lodged *in truſt*. For, as in ſuch ſocieties every one is by nature upon an *equality*, (there being not any one who has a natural right of dominion over his fellow-creatures,) and, as law and government are neceſſary to the well-

being of ſociety, ſeeing the end of civil aſſociation cannot be obtained nor ſecured without it; ſo this makes it neceſſary and reaſonable that legiſlative and governing power ſhould be lodged *in truſt*, in the hands of ſome perſon, or perſons, to be exerciſed for the ſociety's welfare; and the perſons with whom this truſt is lodged are by this conſtituted, not the natural, but the *ſtep-parents* of the people, and guardians of their happineſs; and by this they are inveſted with a *right*, not natural, but derived, a right *derived* from the *people* to make ſuch laws as are for the ſociety's good, and to anſwer the purpoſes of civil aſſociation. And,

As legiſlature itſelf is founded in *reaſon*; ſo the reaſon of things is the *rule* and *meaſure* of it. That is, thoſe upon whom legiſlative power naturally devolves, or to whom it is committed in truſt by others, are not at liberty to make what laws they pleaſe, but they are directed, limited, and bounded in the exerciſe of that power, by the grounds and reaſons, and by the ends and purpoſes upon which legiſlature itſelf is founded, *viz.* the publick or general good of thoſe who are ſubjected to their juriſdiction: ſo that law, ſtrictly ſpeaking, or that law which is in reaſon obliging, is nothing more than that rule of action exemplified, which is founded in the reaſon of things; and *duty* is not the *effect* or *reſult*, but it is the *foundation* of *law*. That is, an action does not become our duty becauſe it is commanded;

manded; but it is commanded becauſe it was our duty antecedent to the command. And conſequently, a thing or action does not become fit, or unfit, by it's being commanded, or forbidden; but it is commanded, or forbidden becauſe it was fit, or unfit, when conſidered abſtractedly from, and antecedent to the promulgation of that law; and which antecedent fitneſs, or unfitneſs, was the *ground* and *reaſon* of ſuch law. This, I ſay, is, or at leaſt, ought always to be the caſe. It is true, the word *law*, in it's common acceptation, ſignifies the *will* of a *ſuperior*: but then, this ſuppoſes that the will of the ſuperior is not *lawleſs* will, (if I may ſo ſpeak,) or a will which is exerted without rule, or reaſon, but a will which is directed by reaſon, a will which commands nothing to be done, but what was fit ſhould be done, antecedent to the command, and which prohibits nothing but what was fit ſhould be avoided, antecedent to the prohibition: I ſay, this is ſuppoſed to be the *will* of the *ſuperior* or *law-giver*, for otherwiſe *legiſlature* would be an *unnatural* and a *monſtrous* thing. And,

When legiſlative power is *rightly employed*, in making *laws* to anſwer the *true ends* of government; then, it is in *itſelf right*; and then, it conſtitutes a *legal* or *juſt* authority. But when it is employed to anſwer *other* and *contrary* purpoſes, then, it is in *itſelf wrong*, and then, it degenerates into *tyranny*. When legiſlative power is employed in making *bad*

laws, or laws which will ſerve a bad purpoſe; this is manifeſtly *wrong*, and therefore, it cannot be deemed juſt authority, but properly comes under the denomination of tyranny. Or when it is employed *idlely* and *triflingly*, by commanding or forbidding actions which are perfectly *indifferent*, and which ſerve only to exemplify the commanding power of the lawgiver, and to extort ſubmiſſion from the ſubject; this is plainly a *proſtitution* of legiſlative power; this is what the ends of law and government will not excuſe or juſtify; and therefore, this cannot juſtly be deemed legal authority, but properly comes under the denomination of *tyranny*, tho' in a much lower, and in a much leſs hurtful degree than in the former caſe. The caſe is the ſame whether legiſlative power be conſidered as lodged in a *human* or in the *divine* hand; it being equally as *unfit* that God ſhould act *wrong* in his legiſlative capacity, as it is that any of his creatures ſhould do ſo. There is indeed this difference, if God ſhould *miſapply* his legiſlative power, he is *above controul* or *correction*; whereas if men *abuſe* their truſt, they are liable to be *controuled* in, and be *puniſhed* for that abuſe.

I am ſenſible, it is commonly urged in this caſe, that God, as he is the great governor of the univerſe, has a *right*, or it is *fit* that he ſhould, in *ſome inſtances*, command for commanding ſake, that thereby he might make *tryal* of our obedience. But alas! our obedience

is

is *ſufficiently tryed* by the many and ſtrong *temptations* with which we are ſurrounded on every ſide, without this expedient; and therefore, this expedient is not neceſſary to anſwer that end. Beſides, this expedient cannot anſwer any *good* purpoſe to us, but may anſwer *many bad* ones. It cannot raiſe in us a juſt and worthy ſenſe of God, but may raiſe in us a mean and unworthy ſenſe of him; *viz.* as one who acts the part of an arbitrary and a tyrannical governor. It cannot excite in us the affection of love to God, but may excite in us a ſlaviſh fear and dread of him. It cannot increaſe our virtue, but may greatly increaſe our guilt, if our diſobedience is to be conſidered as ſuch. And ſuppoſing we yield obedience to ſuch commands, that obedience, to ſay the moſt, would be only yielding to the humour and unreaſonable will of a law-giver, whom it would be wrong to *contend with*, or *diſoblige*. And obedience, ſurely, in ſuch caſes, cannot render a perſon equally valuable with him who obeys a *moral law* from a much *nobler* principle. And, to admit the ſuppoſition that the Deity would go ſo far out of his way, (if I may ſo ſpeak,) and would act ſo contrary to his general character as a wiſe and good governor, by commanding as aforeſaid, is, (I think,) little leſs than blaſphemy, as it is blaſting the *moral* character of the great governor of the univerſe. But then, it is to be remembered, that when I ſay God *will not* act arbitrarily, my meaning is that he *will not* act

thus

thus when the reaſon of things *can* be a rule of action to him, and as to all other inſtances and caſes he muſt act arbitrarily if he acts at all; and therefore, he may and will act thus when the reaſon of the thing requires that he ſhould. As thus, ſuppoſing a *common* or *general good* to have been the *end* of creation to the Deity when he called the *ſolar ſyſtem* into being; then, there was a *reaſon* reſulting from the nature of things why God ſhould create the ſolar ſyſtem rather than let it have remained in a ſtate of non-exiſtence. And, ſuppoſing it to have been perfectly *indifferent* whether the ſolar ſyſten were placed in *that particular* part of ſpace in which it now exiſts, or in *ſome other* part of ſpace; then, as there was a *reaſon* for the Deity *to act* in calling the ſolar ſyſtem into being, ſo there was likewiſe a *reaſon* that he ſhould *act arbitrarily*, in appointing the particular part of ſpace it ſhould exiſt in; becauſe without the *latter*, he could not have performed the *former*. And, this reaſon will hold good in all parallel caſes, whether the Deity be conſidered as acting the part of a *Creator*, or a *Governor*, or of a kind *Phyſician* to his creatures; ſuppoſing ſuch caſes can take place when God acts in either of theſe capacities.

As to *divine* or *poſitive inſtitutions*, (as they are commonly called,) if God gives any of theſe, he is to be conſidered as acting the part, not of a *governor* or *legiſlator*, but of a *Phyſician* to his creatures. And theſe inſtitutions

inſtitutions are to be conſidered, not as *laws* or *rules of action*, but as kind *preſcriptions* to mankind; becauſe this is *more properly* and *truly* the ſtate of the caſe. Man, is not only *weak*, and *infirm* with regard to his *body*, but alſo with regard to his *mind*; and *divine inſtitutions* are intended to anſwer the ſame purpoſe to the *mind*, as *food* and *phyſick* does to the *body*. The mind of man is liable to be *over-acted*, (if I may ſo ſpeak,) and thereby rendered weak and infirm various ways. The buſineſs, the cares, the troubles, the pleaſures of life, and the like, are apt to engroſs the *thoughts* and *captivate* the *minds* of men, and render them *weak* and *infirm*; by which means man becomes *leſs able* to act a worthy and a manly part, and to ſtand out with firmneſs and reſolution againſt the many and ſtrong temptations with which he is ſurrounded. And this makes it neceſſary that the mind of man, ſhould be *ſometimes taken off* from theſe, and *turned* to ſubjects of a more ſerious nature; by which the mind is *recruited*, and *renews* it's ſtrength. And this is the purpoſe that divine inſtitutions are intended to ſerve, *viz.* to take off mens minds, for a time, from the buſineſs, the cares, the troubles, and pleaſures of life; to awaken in them a juſt and worthy ſenſe of God, to draw forth their minds in ſuitable affections towards him; to excite in them a proper ſenſe of the great end and buſineſs of life, to lead them to examine how far that end has been anſwered by them,

and

and wherein they have been defective, to point out to them how they ought to behave in time to come, and the like. Theſe are the *purpoſes* that *divine inſtitutions* are intended to ſerve; and thus they become both *food* and *phyſick* to the *mind* of man. But then, in *divine inſtitutions* there can be nothing *dark* or *myſterious*, becauſe by ſuch a conduct God would *diſappoint* the very end he propoſes to obtain by them; *viz.* the ſtrengthening and recruiting the mind of man. *Myſteries* in a preſcription for the *mind* would anſwer the ſame end as *powder of poſt*, when called by a name that is not underſtood, would do in a preſcription for the *body*, ſuppoſing powder of poſt to have no phyſical quality in it; that is, it would ſerve only to *amuſe* and *miſlead* the patient, which ſurely can never be the caſe with reſpect to God, in his preſcriptions (as a ſpiritual Phyſician) to mankind. *Darkneſs* and *myſteries* are proper expedients to carry on and ſupport *baſe* and *unworthy* deſigns; but God has *no ſuch* deſigns to execute; and therefore, we may be aſſured that he has nothing to do with darkneſs and myſteries in any of his preſcriptions to mankind. It is true that *nature* is full of *myſteries*, and yet nature is of *God*; and the reaſon of this is evident, *viz.* becauſe our underſtandings are *too weak* to diſcover all the ſecrets and powers in nature. The myſteries in nature muſt of courſe bear a *proportion* to that meaſure of underſtanding which every creature poſſeſſes for the contemplation

of

of it. If the underſtanding is *weak*, nature is *more myſterious:* if it is *ſtrong*, nature is *leſs myſterious.* But then, what has this to do with *divine preſcriptions*, which in the very nature of the thing ought to be *plain* and *clear?* Is it to be ſuppoſed that God will be *darkneſs*, where the reaſon of the thing requires he ſhould be *all light?* Will God deal with his creatures in *darkneſs* and *myſtery*, when the nature of the thing requires that he ſhould deal with them in *plainneſs* and *truth?* No ſurely. God has no end to anſwer to himſelf by any preſcription he may give to mankind; and, as ſuch preſcriptions are intended for *our good only*; ſo the nature of the thing requires that they ſhould be delivered in the *plaineſt* and *cleareſt* manner. And therefore, if any preſcriptions are at any time delivered to mankind that are dark and myſterious *in whole*, or *in part*, this, I think, proves to a demonſtration that ſuch preſcriptions *are not* divine. If it ſhould be ſaid that preſcriptions for the *body* are generally dark and myſterious to the patient, and yet have their *proper influence* notwithſtanding; and therefore, why may not preſcriptions for the *mind* be dark and myſterious to the patient and have their *proper influence alſo?* Anſwer, the preſcriptions for the body are *phyſical*, and as ſuch have a *phyſical influence* upon the body; whereas preſcriptions for the mind are *moral*, and as ſuch have a *moral influence* upon the mind. And therefore, tho' phyſical preſcriptions for the body

that are myſterious to the patient may have their proper influence upon the body, becauſe they operate *independent* of the *underſtanding* and *will* of the patient; yet with moral preſcriptions the caſe is otherwiſe, becauſe if ſuch preſcriptions operate at all, it muſt be in the *uſe* and *exerciſe* of the *underſtanding* and *will*; and whereas whatever is dark and myſterious in ſuch preſcriptions *cannot affect* or operate upon the underſtanding and will, from hence it will follow that ſuch preſcriptions *cannot* influence the mind at all; and therefore, are *vain* and *uſeleſs*. I have here purſued the above ſimilitude, becauſe I think it juſtly expoſes and ridicules all darkneſs and myſtery in religion, which, I think, can anſwer no good purpoſe, and which ſerve to perplex and miſlead weak minds.

To conclude this point I obſerve, that the *earthly* governors may *wantonly uſe*, or *wickedly abuſe* their power; yet this is by no means the caſe of the *great governor* of the intelligent and moral world. God will not *needleſsly* command for commanding ſake, and thereby unkindly *increaſe* the burthen of his creatures duty, and likewiſe *increaſe* their guilt upon the breach of ſuch *ſuperfluous* laws. I ſay, we may be well aſſured that God will never act thus, becauſe ſuch a conduct is directly contrary to *true goodneſs*, and therefore, can never be the truth of the caſe. Alas! ſome perſons are apt to meaſure the ways of God, by what they ſee take place amongſt weak, vain, and wicked

wicked men. The princes and potentates of the earth are apt to exerciſe an arbitrary and a deſpotick power over their ſubjects, to manage their people with craft and myſtery, and to pride themſelves in the huzzas and acclamations of the multitude; and this is the very *picture* which ſome Religioniſts draw of their Maker.

And, as there is a natural and an eſſential difference in things, and a rule of action reſulting from that difference, which every moral agent ought in reaſon to govern his behaviour by, and, as God will moſt certainly govern his actions by this rule; ſo from hence it will follow that ſome actions are *in themſelves* juſtly approvable, and others juſtly condemnable, when conſidered *abſtractedly* from any *promulged law*; that ſome actions render the agent the *proper object* of approbation and affection, and other actions render the agent the *proper object* of diſlike and reſentment to every other intelligent being, and therefore, to our Maker as ſuch; conſequently, *ſome actions are in themſelves religious, others irreligious*, when conſidered in the abſtract nature and reaſon of things; that man is *by nature* an accountable creature; and that there is *in nature* a juſt foundation for a future judgment and retribution. Theſe, I think, follow by a natural and neceſſary conſequence from the principles before laid down. If *happineſs* is *in nature* better than *miſery*, then the *communication* of happineſs is *in nature* better or preferable to

the *communication* of miſery, the former is juſtly approvable, and the latter is juſtly condemnable to every other intelligent being, and conſequently, to our Maker as ſuch. To render that to another which is the *proper object* of *every one's* approbation and liking, is, *in the nature of the thing*, commendable and praiſe worthy; to render that to another which is the *proper object* of *every one's* averſion and ſhunning, is, *in the nature of the thing*, diſreputable and juſtly condemnable; and this is the caſe when conſidered abſtractedly from, and independent of, any promulged law. Again, if the communicating of happineſs is *in nature* juſtly approvable, and if the communicating of miſery is *in the nature of the thing* juſtly condemnable, and if there is a *reaſon* reſulting from the *nature of things* for the communication of the former, and a *reaſon againſt* the communicating of the latter; then the communication of the *former* renders the agent the *proper object* of approbation and affection, and the communication of the *latter* renders the agent the *proper object* of diſlike and reſentment to every other intelligent being, and therefore, to the Deity as ſuch; conſequently, ſome actions are *in themſelves religious*, others are *irreligious*; that is, ſome actions render the agent pleaſing, others diſpleaſing to God, when conſidered in the abſtract nature and reaſon of things. * As the

reaſon-

* See my Diſcourſe intitled, *The Sufficiency of Reaſon in Matters of Religion farther conſidered.*

reaſonableneſs of an action ought to determine the will of every *rational* being for the choice of that action, ſuppoſing no other motive be ſuperadded, and ſuppoſing many temptations invite to the contrary; ſo upon this the *equity* and *certainty* of a future judgment is founded, and not upon any divine revelation concerning it. For, as there is a natural and an eſſential difference in things, and a rule of action reſulting from that difference, which every moral agent is in reaſon obliged to govern his actions by, and as there is planted in man a capacity or power which enables him to diſcern that difference, and as it is left to his choice to act either agreeably with or repugnant to reaſon, and thereby to be either a benefactor or a plague to the intelligent world: ſo from hence ariſes the *equity* and *reaſonableneſs* of God's calling ſuch creatures to an account, (when they have finiſhed their courſe in this world,) and rewarding the virtuous, and puniſhing the vicious parts of our ſpecies, according as they have rendered themſelves the ſuitable and proper objects of either. * Happineſs is the end of being to intelligent beings; whoever therefore freely and generouſly contributes to the happineſs of others, by this he becomes a *benefactor* to the intelligent world, and by this the intelligent world becomes in reaſon obliged gratefully and generouſly

* See my Diſcourſe intitled, *The Equity and Reaſonableneſs of a Future Judgment and Retribution exemplified; or a Diſcourſe on the Parable of the unmerciful Servant.*

generouſly to *return the kindneſs*, by contributing to the increaſe of their benefactor's felicity, when power and opportunity ſerve, which contribution is properly called *reward*. And, as happineſs is the end of being to intelligent beings; ſo whoever viciouſly oppoſes and endeavours to fruſtrate and diſappoint the general end of being, by barring the happineſs, and contributing to the miſery of others, ſuch an one is an *enemy* to the intelligent world; and by this the intelligent world becomes in reaſon obliged, (except his repentance and reformation has rendered him the proper object of mercy,) to *return the evil* upon his head, by contributing to his miſery, in proportion to the viciouſneſs of his actions, which contribution is properly called *puniſhment*. So that rewards and puniſhments when *juſtly diſtributed* are founded, not in paſſion or affection, but the reaſon of things. And therefore, when puniſhment is juſtly inflicted upon a proper object, this is not puniſhing for puniſhment ſake, nor is it the effect of mere reſentment; but it is puniſhing upon juſt grounds, and when the reaſon of things requires it; neither is it contrary to, but perfectly conſiſtent with, true goodneſs, yea it reſults from it. For, a being who has the greateſt concern and regard for a general good, has, in conſequence thereof, the greateſt diſlike of, and a juſt indignation againſt, thoſe who oppoſe it. This is the ſtate of the caſe independent of any promulged

mulged law, and when conſidered in the abſtract nature and reaſon of things.

As the three points I have been explaining and proving, are (I think) the *ground* and *foundation* of argument, in *all queſtions* of *moral* conſideration; ſo I have quoted at large what I have before written upon the ſubject, that hereby my reader may at once have a full view of the caſe, without having recourſe to thoſe writings; and that he may ſee thoſe objections *obviated*, which may lay againſt it. Theſe things being premiſed, I am now to apply them to the point in queſtion, and accordingly I am to enquire *firſt*, whether *Religion*, when the term is uſed to expreſs *piety*, has any foundation in *nature*, and what it is that nature *points out* to men with reſpect to it. And here I obſerve, that tho' thoſe words piety, devotion, worſhip, *&c.* which I here uſe as ſynonymous terms, are uſually applied to the *outward actions* of men, ſuch as bowing the body, vocal prayer, and the like, yet theſe outward actions are not the thing itſelf, but only *viſible marks* and *tokens* of it. And in this caſe the ſign is, by a figure of ſpeech, put for the thing ſignified, and is therefore called by the ſame name. True piety conſiſts in a *juſt and worthy ſenſe of God* impreſſed upon the mind of man, which impreſſion excites in him the affection of love, or joy, or hope, or deſire, or the like, and which ſenſe of the Deity affecting the mind of man as aforeſaid is, or may be, expreſſed or made viſible, if I

may

may ſo ſpeak, by ſuch outward actions or words as are made the ſigns and tokens of it; and in the uſe of theſe that *ſenſe*, and thoſe *affections* may be *hightened* and *increaſed*.

I ſay *true* piety, devotion, *&c.* conſiſts in *ſuch a juſt and worthy ſenſe* of God as is ſuitable to his *natural* and his *moral* perfections. For, were we to conceive of God as a *hard* and *ſevere maſter*, as one who lays burthens upon his ſervants that are *great* and *grievous to be born*, who requires *brick* where he gives *no ſtraw*, reaps where he has not ſown, gathers where he has not ſtrawed, and watches for the halting of his ſervants that he might take occaſion from it greatly to puniſh them: or were we to conceive of the Deity as an *arbitrary* and *tyrannical governor*, who acts *unreaſonably* in his legiſlative capacity, by commanding for commanding ſake, and thereby *extorting* ſuch obedience from his ſubjects as no ways anſwers the end of government to them: or were we to conceive of God as an *unkind* and *cruel parent* of mankind, who *takes pleaſure* in their unhappineſs and miſery: and were we to be affected *ſuitably:* this would be ſo far from being *true piety*, that it would be juſt the reverſe, *viz.* it would be the height of *impiety* and *profaneneſs*.

Again, I ſay, that *true piety* is in the *mind*, tho' it may be made viſible as aforeſaid. And, agreeably to this, the *founder* of our (*viz.* the *Chriſtian*) Sect, hath juſtly obſerved, that God, in diſtinction from, and in oppoſition to, body

or

or matter, is *a ſpirit* or *mind*; and therefore, whoever will worſhip God *truly* and *acceptably*, and according to his *nature*, muſt worſhip him *in ſpirit* or *mind*, that being the only *true* or *real* worſhip; becauſe *bodily* worſhip when *ſeparated* from ſuch a ſenſe of the Deity as is uſually intended to be ſet forth by it, is no other than a meer *fiction* or *lye*. And, as all acts of *outward* worſhip are nothing more than *viſible marks* and *tokens* of that inward piety which takes place in the mind, and when they are ſeparated from that ſenſe of the Deity are mere emptineſs or nothing; ſo thoſe outward marks are, in ſome caſes, *merely arbitrary*; that is, they are not natural marks of that reſpect which is intended to be ſet forth by them, but are *made* tokens of reſpect by the *faſhion* and *cuſtom* of the world, and as ſuch are liable to be *altered* and *changed*. Thus, amongſt our ſelves, cuſtom has made *bowing* the *body* to be a mark of reſpect for *one ſex*, and *bowing* the *knee* to be a mark of reſpect for *the other*. And, as each ſex perform *different* actions when they pay their reſpect to their *neighbours*; ſo they uſe thoſe *different actions* as *marks* of their reſpect to *God*. And indeed, *cuſtom* muſt, in ſome meaſure, be our *guide* in this affair; becauſe it would be very prepoſterous for a man to put off his *hat* as a *mark* of reſpect to his *neighbour*, and to put off his *ſhoe* as a *token* of his reſpect to *God*; ſeeing the latter action would not have the appearance of being a mark of reſpect, when, and where cuſtom had

conſtituted the former. But then, tho' the viſible marks of reſpect are, in ſome caſes, at leaſt, merely arbitrary; yet, I think, no action can, with any *propriety*, be conſtituted a mark of reſpect that is in itſelf apparently a mark of the contrary. That is, no action can be made a mark of *goodneſs* that is in itſelf a *bad action*; nor can an act of *cruelty* be made a token of *pity* and *kindneſs*, becauſe the action itſelf beſpeaks the contrary; or, at leaſt, ſuch a conduct would be greatly prepoſterous. And therefore, were a man to *cut* and *wound* his body till the blood guſhed out, as the *Prieſts* of *Baal* did, and do other ſuch like actions, and were he to uſe theſe actions as *tokens* of that *ſenſe of God* which he has upon his mind; thoſe actions, I think, could not convey to the beholders a *juſt* and *worthy ſenſe of God*, becauſe the actions themſelves plainly beſpeak the contrary; namely, they beſpeak the being, who is applied to in this way, to be *pleaſed* with *blood* and *ſlaughter*; which, ſurely, would not be a juſt and worthy, but a falſe and unworthy, repreſentation of the Deity, were he to be applied to in ſuch a manner. And,

As true piety conſiſts in our having a juſt and worthy ſenſe of God impreſſed upon our minds, and in our being ſuitably affected therewith; ſo it is founded in *nature*, God is not only compleatly perfect in himſelf, but he is alſo the *fountain* of *being*, and of *all good* to us; and, as ſuch, the nature of the thing requires, or it is *juſt* and *reaſonable*, that we

ſhould frequently and upon all proper occaſions awaken in our ſelves a juſt and worthy ſenſe of God, and be ſuitably affected therewith. This, I ſay, is a *ſuitable* and *proper behaviour* for ſuch dependent beings as we are, towards their great and kind Creator, from whom we have received our being, and by whoſe providence we are continually upheld and preſerved. It is likewiſe *fit* and *reaſonable* with regard to the *purpoſe* it is ſubſervient to, as it naturally tends to excite and engage our *imitation* of the Deity, and thereby to render our ſelves *approvable* in his ſight. Moreover, *perfection* is, in the nature of the thing, preferable to *imperfection*, and, as ſuch, it is the *proper object* of our choice, and this makes it *reaſonable* or *our duty* to make uſe of thoſe means that are proper to lead us thereto, of which means, I think, it muſt be allowed that *true piety* is the principal. When we entertain our minds with a juſt ſenſe of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, and how that wiſdom and goodneſs has been exemplified in promoting our own and the common tranquillity; and when we are ſuitably affected therewith; this is, not only acting *properly* towards the *Deity*, but it alſo tends to excite our *imitation* of him, and therefore, it muſt be our *duty* or it is *reaſonable* that we ſhould be frequent in ſuch exerciſes. Again, when we reflect ſeriouſly upon the *rectitude* of the divine nature, *viz.* that God's affections and actions are always *moſt pure*, as they are perfectly conformable to that rule of action that is founded in the *reaſon of*

things; and when we likewiſe view our ſelves as it were in a glaſs, and ſee how greatly we have *departed* from this rule, and when we are *ſuitably affected* therewith; this naturally tends to *humble us* in our own ſight, to engage us to be *watchful* of our *behaviour* for the time to come, and to endeavour to render our ſelves the *proper objects* of God's mercy. And as this is our caſe; ſo our preſent circumſtances *require* or make it *reaſonable* that we ſhould be frequent in ſuch exerciſes.

If it ſhould be ſaid, that *prayer*, in this view of the caſe, is a *needleſs* performance, becauſe *meditation* and *reflexion* may anſwer the end without it. Anſwer, admitting that *one* branch of piety, by a conſtant and proper application, may be *ſufficient* to anſwer the forementioned purpoſe; yet, I think, that will not be a ſufficient ground for *diſcouraging* or *laying aſide* the uſe of the reſt, when, perhaps, the uſe *of all* may ſcarce be ſufficient to *call in*, and *retain*, our attention, and *engage* our affections and imitation as aforeſaid.

If it ſhould be aſked, that if true piety conſiſts in having a juſt and worthy ſenſe of God impreſſed upon the *mind*, and the being *ſuitably affected* therewith, and if St *Paul*'s remark be *juſt*, viz. that *bodily* exerciſe profiteth little, and if our *Saviour*'s doctrine be *true*, viz. that God is a *ſpirit*, and they that worſhip him (truly and acceptably) muſt worſhip him in *ſpirit* and in *truth*, for the Father ſeeketh ſuch to worſhip him, then, to *what purpoſe* can

bodily

bodily or *external* worſhip ſerve? Anſwer, bodily worſhip is intended to be ſubſervient to that worſhip which is *ſpiritual* or in the mind. For, tho' *eating* a bit of *bread*, and *drinking* a ſip of *wine*, cannot poſſibly increaſe the divine knowledge of us, by informing God of ſomething concerning us, which before he was ignorant of; nor can it increaſe God's kindneſs and good-will towards us, by diſpoſing him to do that for us, which before he was not inclined to do; yet thoſe actions may *lead us into*, and *ſtir up in others*, a juſt and ſuitable ſenſe of what they were intended to be the outward tokens and memorials of, and thereby give occaſion to our ſelves and others to be *ſuitably affected* therewith, and to *act accordingly*; and when this is the caſe, then thoſe outward actions become ſubſervient to *true piety*, and anſwer the end they are capable of ſerving, and which they are intended to ſerve. And this, I think, is the deſign of all *external worſhip*, and all *poſitive inſtitutions*, viz. to be ſubſervient to *inward piety*, and thereby to produce in us ſuitable affections and actions. For, to ſuppoſe in this caſe, that *mere obedience* to a poſitive law or rather inſtitution, conſidered ſimply as ſuch, will render us *pleaſing to God*, is, I think, a moſt groſs *miſrepreſentation* of the Deity; becauſe it ſuppoſes God will *proſtitute* his legiſlative power to anſwer ſo *needleſs* a purpoſe as to obtain *mere obedience* from his creatures thereby; ſuch a conduct may indeed be ſuitable to the wantonneſs, pride, and vanity of

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ſome *human legiſlators*; but it cannot comport with the juſtice, wiſdom, and goodneſs of the *great governor* of the univerſe; and therefore, cannot be the truth of the caſe.

But farther, if outward or bodily worſhip is only a ſign or token of that piety which takes place in the mind, and if thoſe tokens are not, in many caſes, natural marks of reſpect, but are arbitrarily conſtituted to be ſuch by the faſhion and cuſtom of the world; then, why may not *God* interpoſe and appoint thoſe outward ſigns of inward piety if he pleaſes? Anſwer, God may do ſo if he pleaſe, for any thing I know, or for any reaſon I can give to the contrary, if the circumſtances of things render ſuch an interpoſition *proper* and *uſeful* to man. But if the circumſtances of things do not require ſuch an interpoſition; then, as it would be *uſeleſs*, ſo it is not likely to be the caſe, becauſe it is not to be expected that God will thus interpoſe to anſwer no good purpoſe to mankind. By the circumſtances of things I mean, when the faſhion of the world has conſtituted ſuch actions to be marks of inward piety as are in themſelves natural marks of the contrary; that is, when thoſe actions naturally tend to raiſe in the mind of the actor and the ſpectators, not a juſt and worthy ſenſe of God, but a falſe and unworthy ſenſe of him, and in that reſpect are rather marks of impiety than piety: I ſay, when this is the caſe; then, as there is a *reaſon* reſulting from the *circumſtances* of things for ſuch an interpoſition, *viz.* the

the *reforming* the forementioned abuſe; ſo God may, if he pleaſe, kindly interpoſe and appoint what actions ſhall be the tokens of inward piety, to anſwer that purpoſe. But then, where thoſe circumſtances are wanting, it is not likely that he will do ſo.

From what I have obſerved, I think it appears, that *Religion* (when the term is uſed to expreſs *devotion*, *worſhip*, &c.) is *founded in nature or reaſon*; and from thence likewiſe appears what it is that *nature* points out to men with reſpect to it. Here is likewiſe a *plain rule* by which a man may *judge* of himſelf whether he be truly religious, or not; or, in other words, whether he be truly pious, or not. If a man, upon all proper occaſions, awakens in himſelf a juſt and worthy *ſenſe* of God, and if he is *ſuitably* affected therewith, and if he, when the circumſtances of things require it, *expreſſes* that inward ſenſe by ſuch *outward acts* as are not improper in themſelves, and which the faſhion and cuſtom of the world or which God has conſtituted to be the ſigns and tokens of it; then, he may very juſtly conclude of himſelf that he is a *truly religious* or *pious man*. But, if a man lives as it were *without God* in the world, that is, if God is *not at all* in his thoughts, or if he from neceſſity is *forced* to think of God, (which will ſometimes be the caſe, as when the circumſtances of things will make the ſenſe of a Deity preſent to a man's mind) or if he ſhould *voluntarily* think of God, but *is not* ſuitably affected therewith; then,

then, he *cannot*, with any propriety, conſider himſelf as a religious or pious man, even tho' he ſhould frequently uſe thoſe actions that are made to be the outward ſigns and tokens of it; becauſe he is *wanting* in that wherein *true piety* conſiſts. This is the ſtate of the caſe independent of any revelation or promulged law; and when conſidered in the abſtract nature and reaſon of things.

I now proceed to enquire *ſecondly*, whether Religion (when the term is uſed to expreſs that which is the *ground* of our *acceptance* with God) is likewiſe founded in *nature*. And here the way ſeems *plain* and *obvious*. For, if there be a natural and an eſſential difference in things, and if one thing or action be really better or preferable to another in nature, and if there is a rule of action reſulting from that difference which every moral agent ought in reaſon to govern his actions by, and if Almighty God makes this rule the meaſure of his actions in his dealings with his creatures, in all inſtances and caſes in which it can be a rule to him, which are moſtly *ſelf-evident* truths; then from hence it will unavoidably follow, that whoever makes *this rule* the *meaſure* of his affections and actions, muſt, *by this*, render himſelf *approvable* and *acceptable* to God, as he *hereby* renders himſelf the *ſuitable* and *proper* object of God's approbation and affection. And whoever viciouſly and wickedly *greatly departs* from this rule, and *perſiſts* in it, ſuch an one muſt be *unacceptable* and *diſapprovable*

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to his Maker, as he *hereby* renders himſelf the *ſuitable* and *proper* object of the divine diſlike and reſentment. This, I ſay, is moſt apparently the true ſtate of the caſe. For, as God is the *moſt perfect* intelligence, if I may ſo ſpeak; ſo he muſt, if he acts *conſiſtent with himſelf*, approve of *every intelligent* being who acts *conformable* to that principle of intelligence that is planted in him; and God muſt likewiſe *diſapprove* of *every intelligent* being who acts *greatly contrary* to that intelligent principle. And therefore, when a man acts ſuch a part in life as in reaſon he ought, he will of courſe be accepted and approved of God, it being morally impoſſible that it ſhould be otherwiſe. When a man makes the *law of nature* the rule and meaſure of his affections and actions, he then acts that very part in life which his Creator deſigned he ſhould act, and hereby he *anſwers* the end and purpoſe of his creation; and therefore, we may with as much juſtneſs and propriety doubt of the exiſtence of a God, as doubt whether ſuch a being will be acceptable to him. And, on the other ſide, if a man's conduct is the *reverſe* of this, then, we are aſſured, from the reaſon of the thing, that *ſuch a man* will be *reprobated* or *diſapproved* by his Maker. This is the ſtate of the caſe, independent of any promulged law, and when conſidered in the abſtract nature and reaſon of things.

I am ſenſible, God may, if he pleaſe, give a revelation to mankind. That is, it is no way repugnant to our natural notions of a Deity to

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ſuppoſe, that God may kindly interpoſe and give a revelation, when the circumſtances of things render ſuch an interpoſition *expedient* and *uſeful* to men. And this was plainly the caſe of the *Chriſtian* Revelation. Men were *greatly ſunk* in their underſtandings, and *greatly debauched* in their affections and actions; and this rendered the Chriſtian Revelation *greatly expedient*, and *greatly uſeful* to mankind. But then, the expedient of this aroſe, not from any *defect* in the natural conſtitution of things, ſo as that man could not have done without it, ſuppoſing him to have uſed thoſe abilities and advantages that nature has furniſhed him with; I ſay, that the *expedience* of a revelation does not ariſe from any ſuch *imperfection* in the natural conſtitution of things, but only from a *general corruption* as aforeſaid. Beſides, a *plain rule* of action laid down, is what the bulk of the people can have *eaſy* acceſs to, and be *guided* by, without *reaſoning* upon every fact they happen to be concerned with, and this renders a promulged law of *farther uſe* to mankind. Tho' indeed, all revelation and promulged laws have their *diſadvantages* attending them alſo; *viz.* they are liable to be *corrupted*, *altered*, and *changed*, as they fall into the hands of *weak* or *artful* men, by which *great miſchief* may accrue to our ſpecies. And this muſt, in the nature of the thing, be the caſe of *all revelation* in general, and has been the caſe of the *Chriſtian Revelation* in particular, as experience and fact do abundantly teſtify. Nothing ſurely has been

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more *tortured*, and made to ſpeak *different* and *oppoſite* things than the Chriſtian Revelation, which has been very *fatal* in it's conſequences to mankind. There has been nothing more oppoſite and contrary than the various *principles* and *ſchemes* of Chriſtians, the adherers to which have each of them conſidered his principles and his ſcheme to be *Chriſtianity*; and all theſe, tho' never ſo oppoſite, have been *grounded*, or at leaſt pretended to be grounded on the Chriſtian Revelation; by which means men have been led, not only into *falſe ways* of preſerving the happineſs of another world, but alſo groundleſsly to *hate* and *perſecute*, and uſe one another *ill* in this. So that, tho' there are *great advantages* which may attend a revelation and a promulged law; yet theſe have their *diſadvantages* alſo.

But farther, Divine Revelation, ſo far as it comes under the denomination of a *law*, can be *no more*, nor *no other* than a publication, or republication, or an exemplification, of the original and primary law of nature. The law of nature or reaſon is a *perfect law*. It is a perfect law as it takes place in, and is a *proper rule* in all inſtances and caſes, and under all poſſible circumſtances where a law or rule of action is wanting, and as to all other caſes that are in themſelves *perfectly indifferent*, legiſlature is not concerned with them. It would be an *imperfection*, even in a *human* legiſlator, to command for *commanding ſake*, much more in the *great governor* of the univerſe, who has

no vitiated affection to gratify thereby, and therefore can be under no *temptation* to act below his character. It is alſo a perfect law as it is a *proper rule* of action to *all intelligent* beings; and conſequently to the *Deity* as ſuch. It is by this law that God governs his actions, as well when he acts in his *legiſlative*, as in his *creating* capacity; that is, he makes the *reaſon of things*, and not *capricious humour* and *arbitrary pleaſure*, the *meaſure* of his actions in both. God can, with regard to his natural liberty, and as he is above controul, act *unreaſonably* both in his creating and in his legiſlative capacity; that is, God can create beings on purpoſe to make them miſerable, and he can give ſuch laws to his ſubjects as no way anſwer the ends of government to them, and which ſerve only to increaſe the burthen of his ſubjects duty, and enlarge their guilt upon the breach of ſuch laws; but then we are morally certain that he *never will act thus*, becauſe ſuch a conduct is *wrong* in itſelf, and becauſe there is nothing in nature to *excite* him to it. To ſay that God may act thus in order to *try* our *obedience*, is moſt weakly urged; becauſe, (as I have already obſerved) our obedience is ſufficiently tryed without God's giving us any ſuch laws, and therefore ſuch tryal would be both *needleſs* and *uſeleſs*; and becauſe ſuch tryal can anſwer no good purpoſe, and may anſwer a very bad one, *viz.* the greatly increaſing of our guilt; and conſequently there is a reaſon, reſulting from the nature of things,

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againſt God's giving any ſuch unneceſſary and uſeleſs, or rather hurtful, laws to mankind. From what I have obſerved, I think, it plainly appears that divine revelation, ſo far as it comes under the denomination of a *law*, can be *no other*, nor *no more*, than a publication, or republication, or an exemplification, of the original and primary law of nature.

I am ſenſible likewiſe that God may, if he pleaſe, act the part of a *Phyſician* to his creatures, by appointing or directing them to the uſe of *ſuch means* as are proper for their *ſpiritual health*; that is, for their improvement and eſtabliſhment in piety and virtue. But then, theſe inſtitutions, (as I have before obſerved) do not properly come under the denomination of *laws*, but rather of kind *preſcriptions*, to mankind; theſe being inſtituted and intended to be, not ſo much conſidered as acts of *homage* to God, as means of *good* to us. God requires the uſe of theſe, not ſo much conſidered as acts of *obedience* to himſelf, as that we ſhould become *wiſer* and *better* in the uſe of them; or at leaſt to preſerve us in that good ſtate in which we are. As thus, we are required or directed to eat bread and drink wine as memorials of actions that are paſt, in order to excite in us proper reflexions, and thereby to produce in us ſuitable affections and actions. Now, it is not our paying obedience to a command, by eating bread and drinking wine, and barely thinking of thoſe things the memory of which was intended to be perpetuated by

by thoſe actions; but it is our performing thoſe actions ſo, as to anſwer the end propoſed by the inſtitutor to be obtained by them, which renders the inſtitution of uſe to us, and which renders us acceptable to God in the uſe of it. And here it is to be obſerved, that the inſtitutor might if he pleaſed have appointed the eating fleſh and drinking water, inſtead of appointing the eating bread and drinking wine to anſwer the purpoſe aforeſaid; and if he had done ſo, that purpoſe would have been as well anſwered by the former, as by the latter. But then, in this caſe, the inſtitutor does not act as a *legiſlator*, by commanding what is in itſelf indifferent, but only kindly directs us to the uſe of a *means*, which when rightly uſed and applied by us, becomes ſubſervient to the end propoſed to be obtained by it, and which would have been the caſe of any other means; and therefore, to urge this as an inſtance of God's commanding what is in itſelf indifferent, is, I think, exceeding weak. Where a good end is to be obtained *various ways*, and all thoſe ways are *equally ſubſervient* to that end; then it muſt be a matter of *indifference* which of thoſe ways is made uſe of to obtain it; and were God to interpoſe and command, or appoint, or direct, (for whatever word is uſed in the preſent caſe it mattereth not, becauſe words do not make things to be otherwiſe than they are in themſelves,) I ſay, were God to appoint or direct us to purſue that end in one or other of theſe ways, this would be an inſtance

inſtance of his *kindneſs* and *good-will* towards us, as hereby he would ſhew himſelf to be concerned for our well-doing. But then, to urge this as an inſtance of God's acting the part of an abſolute and arbitrary governor, is, I think, greatly below a man of underſtanding; becauſe, in truth, there is nothing in it; ſeeing, it is only contending for ſuch abſolute ſovereignty in the Deity, as, I preſume, no man of underſtanding ever denied that he might exerciſe, when the circumſtances of things rendered it proper that he ſhould, which is the preſent caſe.

I am alſo ſenſible, that in *difficult* and *complex* caſes our diſcerning faculty is ſometimes *incapable* of diſtinguiſhing betwixt truth and error, right and wrong, and conſequently is liable to *err* with reſpect to both. But then, this is the caſe as well *with* as *without* divine revelation, there not having been any divine revelation yet given to the world, which has *diſcharged* us of thoſe difficulties. And, as to revelation itſelf, our diſcerning faculty is *abſolutely neceſſary* to direct us in the *uſe* and *application* of it, for otherwiſe we are in great danger of being *miſled* by it. Thus for example, in the Chriſtian revelation, (which is allowed to be the moſt perfect of any revelation that has hitherto come forth under a heavenly character,) we are required to love our enemies, to do good to them that hate us, to take no thought for the morrow, not to reſiſt evil and the like; which precepts were

were we not to exerciſe our *diſcerning faculty* in order to diſcover *when*, and *how far*, and under *what circumſtances* they are to be *rules of action* to us, we ſhould be in great danger of being *miſled* by them, both to our *own*, and the *publick* hurt. So that divine revelation is only intended to *aſſiſt* and *help* our diſcerning faculty, and not to *ſuperſede* it and *ſet it aſide*. Our diſcerning faculty, or in other words our reaſon, was intended to be our *guide*, as well in *religious* matters, as in *all other* affairs; and were we to *lay it aſide*, or ſuffer it to be *over-ruled*, we ſhould lay ourſelves open to *all deluſion*. By ſuffering our reaſon to be *over-ruled*, I mean, when we *receive* that for *truth*, which appears to our diſcerning faculty to be *error*; that for *right*, which appears to us to be *wrong*; ſuch a ſubmiſſion puts us off our *guard*, and lays us open to all *fraud* and *impoſition*. As to *darkneſs* and *myſteries* in religion, theſe, as I have already obſerved, may anſwer the purpoſes of cunning crafty men, but they by no means comport with the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, who has no purpoſe to anſwer to himſelf, by any revelation he makes to his creatures, and therefore, can only intend his creatures *good* by ſuch revelation; which end *darkneſs* and *myſteries* would not *promote*, but *diſappoint*. And to argue from *myſteries* in *nature*, to *myſteries* in *religion*, would be moſt *unſafe*; becauſe it tends to *diſarm* us of what God and nature has provided for our ſecurity, by rendering our diſcerning faculty *uſeleſs* in

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all enquiries about religion. For, if myſteries in religion are to be admitted, becauſe there are myſteries in nature, then the *groſſeſt wickedneſs* may be put upon us as *religious*, and we could have no *juſt* objection againſt it, ſeeing, in this view of the caſe, it is to be conſidered as a *myſtery*, or a *religious injunction*, that we cannot ſee the fitneſs nor reaſonableneſs of. And, tho' it appears plainly to us to be *evil*, yet that will not be a proper ground for us to *reject* it; becauſe myſteries in religion are what our diſcerning faculty cannot *comprehend*, nor form any judgment about; and therefore it is not to be *made uſe of* with reſpect to them. And there is ſcarce any thing how vile and wicked ſoever it may appear to be, but ſomething or other in nature may be found out, and be repeſented as *analogous* to it. That there *are*, and *will be*, myſteries in nature is moſt certain, becauſe in a multitude of caſes nature is *above the reach* of our diſcerning faculty, and in thoſe inſtances it *muſt* and *will be* myſterious to us: but will it therefore follow that there may be myſteries in *Religion?* by no means. Religion is of *moral* conſideration, and is what *each individual* of our ſpecies is particularly intereſted in, and therefore, in the nature of the thing, it ought to be *plain* and *obvious*; becauſe ſo far as it is otherwiſe, as it does not come within the reach of our diſcerning faculty, ſo far it can be of no *uſe* nor *concern* to us. And God would act very *prepoſterouſly*, were he to be *at all dark*,

where the reaſon of the thing requires he ſhould be *all light*. Beſides, divine revelation, ſurely, muſt be intended to *inform* and *inſtruct* us, and not to *amaſe*, *perplex*, and *confound* us, which are the produce of *darkneſs* and *myſteries* in religion.

And, though in *difficult* and *complex* caſes our diſcerning faculty is ſometimes *incapable* of diſtinguiſhing betwixt truth and error, right and wrong, and conſequently is liable to err with reſpect to both, which, as I have already obſerved, is the caſe as well *with* as *without* divine revelation, and which, indeed, muſt appear to be the caſe of *man*, when we conſider *how* he is to attain knowledge, and how many things there are in his way that are liable to *miſlead* him; yet, notwithſtanding this, his caſe is by no means *deſperate*. Man (as I have ſhewn above) is an *accountable* creature, and, as ſuch, reaſon requires that he ſhould have *fair play* for his life, that is, reaſon requires that he ſhould be dealt with in a way of *juſtice* and *equity*. And therefore, let a man be in what circumſtances he will, whether *with* or *without* divine revelation, if he does *his beſt* to have his underſtanding rightly informed as to truth and good, that is, if he *does all* that in reaſon and equity can be expected from him in his circumſtances to obtain ſuch information, and if he acts *honeſtly* and *uprightly* according to it, he muſt and will be accepted and approved of God, even though he ſhould err with reſpect to both. I ſay,

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ſuch a man *muſt* and *will* be approved and accepted of God; and the reaſon is moſt obvious, becauſe, by *ſuch a conduct*, he renders himſelf the *ſuitable* and *proper* object of God's approbation and affection. This muſt and will be the caſe, whether men be of high or low rank in the world, or whether their advantages in it be more or leſs. And this muſt and will be the caſe, in all ages, and under all diſpenſations, and in all worlds, if I may ſo ſpeak; becauſe God is equally diſpoſed at *all times*, even from everlaſting to everlaſting, to *accept* and *approve* of every creature, who renders himſelf the *ſuitable* and *proper* object of his approbation and affection; and to *diſapprove* or *reprobate* every creature, who by his *miſbehaviour* renders himſelf the *ſuitable* and *proper* object of his diſlike and reſentment. And though divine revelation may *aſſiſt* and *help* our diſcerning faculty in the diſcovery of truth and good, and in diſtinguiſhing them from their contraries; yet it cannot poſſibly *alter* the *grounds* of our acceptance with God, becauſe that is *eternally* and *unchangeably* the ſame.

But farther, as there are many things that are liable to miſlead the underſtandings of men, and as there are many and ſtrong temptations with which men are ſurrounded, and by which they are in *great danger* of being *ſometimes* betrayed into folly; ſo this renders it *unreaſonable* to expect that man, in his preſent circumſtances, ſhould be either *infallible* or *impeccable*;

that is, it is unreaſonable to expect that he ſhould be without error, or without fault, becauſe it is *great odds* but he will in ſome inſtances fall into *both*. And, as this is the preſent ſtate of mankind; ſo from hence it will follow, that when a man does his *beſt* to have his underſtanding rightly informed, and when, in the *general courſe* of his actions, he acts *agreeably* thereto, and in thoſe inſtances in which, through the ſtrength of temptation, he has tranſgreſſed the rule of his duty, he is *ſenſible* of, and *humbled* for his faults, and makes his miſcarriages a reaſon to himſelf to be *more watchful* and *careful* of his behaviour in time to come, ſuch a man muſt and will be *accepted* and *approved* of God, becauſe he has, *by ſuch a behaviour*, rendered himſelf the ſuitable and proper *object* of the divine approbation and affection.

This, I ſay, *ought* in reaſon to be the caſe; and therefore, *moſt certainly* it is ſo. For, as man is ſo conſtituted and circumſtanced as that it is *ten thouſand* to *one* but he will *act wrong* in ſome inſtances; and were God to be ſo extream as to mark every thing that man does amiſs, and would not accept of a man's ſincere repentance and reformation as a *proper ground* of *mercy* to him, for thoſe offences which through the ſtrength of temptation he has been hurried into; then, man would lie under a very *great diſadvantage*, and exiſtence would be ſo far from being a *favour* and a *benefit*, that, on the contrary, it would be a very

very *great hardſhip* and an *injury* to him; and then, it could not have been *goodneſs* and *kindneſs*, but it muſt have been *malice* and *ill will* which was the *ſpring* of action to God in the *creation* of man. And, if this were the caſe, then, man would not be dealt with in a way of *juſtice* and *equity*. For, if man's feet are, by his Creator, ſet in ſuch *ſlippery* places, as that it is *ten thouſand* to *one* but he will fall; then, if he ſhould fall, and ſhould riſe again by repentance and reformation, and yet ſhould not find mercy at the hands of his Maker, which in reaſon and equity he ought, in this caſe, his exiſtence would be a very great hardſhip, and an injury to him, and he would not be equally dealt with. And, on the other ſide, he, who in the general courſe of his actions, acts the contrary part, muſt and will be diſapproved of God; becauſe, by ſuch a conduct, he renders himſelf the ſuitable and proper object of the divine reprobation. It is not a particular action, but a man's general behaviour which conſtitutes his character, and denominates him to be a good or bad, a virtuous or vicious, a religious or irreligious, man.

From what I have obſerved, I think, it plainly appears, that Religion (when the term is uſed to expreſs the grounds of our *acceptance* with God) is founded in *nature*, and that *nature* or *reaſon* affords a plain obvious rule, by which *true religion* may be diſtinguiſhed from that which is *falſe*. For, if there is a natural

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and an eſſential difference in things; and if there is a rule of action reſulting from that difference, which every moral agent ought in reaſon to govern his behaviour by; and if God makes this rule the meaſure of his actions, in all inſtances and caſes in which it can be a rule to him, which is moſt apparently the true ſtate of the caſe; then, from hence it will naturally, neceſſarily, and unavoidably follow that *perſonal valuableneſs*, or the governing our *minds* and *lives* by that rule of action which is founded in the reaſon of things, or, in other words, the acting *that part* in life which in reaſon we ought, this is *true religion*; this will render us *truly pleaſing* and *acceptable* to God. And, on the other ſide, whatever is repreſented as the grounds of our acceptance with God, *beſides* perſonal valuableneſs in us, *beſides* the being in our ſelves the ſuitable and proper objects of the divine approbation and affection, ſuch things *will not* render us truly pleaſing and acceptable to the Deity, and conſequently, *all ſuch things* are *falſe religion*, let them come from what quarter ſoever, even though *Paul*, or an *Angel* from Heaven, were to be the *promulger* of ſuch doctrines. God is not only infinite in all *natural* perfections, as he is all preſence, all knowledge, and all power; but he is alſo infinite in all moral perfections, as his conduct, in the exerciſe of his knowledge and power, is, in all inſtances and caſes, perfectly conformed to that eternal and invariable *rule of action* which reſults

from, and is founded in the natural and eſſential differences in things. And, as the reaſon of the thing requires, that nothing ſhould be *approved* by an *intelligent being*, but what is *in itſelf* the proper object of ſuch *approbation*, and it's being ſuch an object ſhould be the *ground* or *reaſon* of that approbation; and, on the other ſide, that nothing ſhould be *diſapproved* by an *intelligent being*, but what is *in itſelf* the proper object of ſuch *reprobation*, and it's being ſuch an object ſhould be the *ground* or *reaſon* of that reprobation; I ſay, as the reaſon of the thing requires this; ſo from hence we may be *morally certain*, that nothing but *perſonal valuableneſs* in a moral agent, can be the *ground* of that agent's acceptance with God; and that nothing but *perſonal vileneſs* in ſuch an agent, can be the *ground* of the divine reprobation of him. So that true religion, in the preſent caſe, conſiſts *in this*, and *in this only*, viz. the acting ſuch a part in life as in reaſon we ought; or, in other words, the governing our affections and actions by the law of reaſon; or, at leaſt, the coming as near to this as may reaſonably be expected from us in our preſent circumſtances. This, I ſay, is *true religion*, and *this only*; becauſe it is this, and this only, which renders us the *proper objects* of the divine approbation and affection; and therefore, it muſt be this, and this only, which *can* and *will* be the ground of our acceptance with God. And for as much as there is nothing

nothing in nature but perſonal valuableneſs in us, which can render us the proper objects of God's approbation and affection; therefore, whatever *beſide* this is repreſented as the *grounds* of our acceptance with the Deity, that muſt of neceſſity be *falſe religion*, and cannot poſſibly be otherwiſe. As to any inſtituted means of religion, theſe are to be conſidered as *means only*, and not as the *end* which is intended to be promoted by them. And they become *means*, not by being *inſtituted*, nor yet barely by being *uſed*, but only when they are *ſo uſed*, as to become *ſubſervient* to that end, *viz.* the making us *wiſe* and *good*, which conſtitutes *true religion*, in the preſent caſe.

I am ſenſible, that theſe are *truths* which will not be acceptable to many *Religioniſts*, even to many *zealous* and *orthodox Chriſtians*, who are very unwilling to be convinced that *virtue* and *happineſs* are ſo neceſſarily connected together, that the *latter* cannot be obtained without the *former*; that a man cannot obtain the *happineſs* of *another world*, without becoming a *good man* in *this*. Alas! how many Chriſtians are there who would much rather be carried ſafe to heaven, by the *ſtrength* and *virtue* of their *Maſter's merits*; than be obliged to *follow him*, in that *narrow way*, and through that *ſtreight gate* of virtue and good works, which is the *only path* that leads thither. It is not the offering to God *thouſands* of rams, nor *ten thouſands* of rivers

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of oil, nor the *firſt-born* of a man's offſpring, nor the *firſt-born* of every creature, which can poſſibly render a man *approvable* to God; becauſe as theſe do not render a man *perſonally valuable in himſelf*, they do not render him the *proper object* of the divine approbation and affection. But it is the *doing juſtice*, the *loving mercy*, and the *walking humbly with God*, which will render a man *acceptable* to the Deity; becauſe theſe render him *perſonally valuable in himſelf*, and the *proper object* of the divine acceptance. And this is the caſe both *with* and *without* divine revelation, and whether men be in high or low ſtations, and whereever their lot is caſt, in any part of the world. The ſum of the matter is this, true religion, (when the term is uſed to expreſs the grounds of our acceptance with God) conſiſts in the right uſe and exerciſe of our *intellectual* and *active faculties*, by our doing all that in *reaſon* may be expected from us, in our reſpective circumſtances, to have our *underſtandings* rightly informed; and in an *honeſt* and *upright behaviour*, in the *general* courſe of our actions, agreeably thereto. This, I ſay, and *this only*, conſtitutes *true religion*; becauſe it is this, and this only, which renders us *perſonally valuable* in our ſelves, and the *proper objects* of divine regard. And whatever *beſides* this is repreſented to be, or which may be relied upon as the *ground* of acceptance with God, all ſuch things

are *falſe grounds*, and conſequently, are *falſe religion*. This is the ſtate of the caſe independent of any divine revelation or promulged law, and when conſidered in the abſtract nature and reaſon of things. And this leads me to enquire,

Thirdly and laſtly, whether *religion*, when the term is uſed to expreſs the *grounds* upon which *ſinners* obtain the *divine mercy*, is alſo founded in *nature*. And here, I think, it will be proper to ſtate the notion of *mercy*, and ſhew what idea we annex to that term, in the preſent caſe. By mercy, I think, we intend the *remitting* to an offender, in whole, or in part, the *puniſhment* which, by his *offence*, he had juſtly rendered himſelf obnoxious to. So that mercy ſtands oppoſed *firſt*, to *cruelty*, whereof *juſtice* is the mean. He who lays upon the offender a *greater* puniſhment * than his crime deſerves, is *cruel*. He who puniſhes *equal* to the offence, is *juſt*. And he who *remits* that puniſhment, in whole, or in part, is *merciful*. Again, *mercy* ſtands oppoſed *ſecondly*, to *unmerciful*; that is, to the puniſhing ſuch offenders as have rendered themſelves the proper objects of mercy. He who *puniſhes* ſuch an offender as has rendered himſelf the *proper object* of mercy, is *unmerciful*; and he who *remits* that puniſhment, is *merciful*. Again mercy, or a merciful diſpoſition, is generally, and, I think,

* See my *Collection of Tracts*, page 142.

think, juſtly eſteemed to be a *perfection*, or a *good* quality in the agent in which it takes place; and unmercifulneſs, or an unmerciful diſpoſition, is generally eſteemed to be an *imperfection*, or an *evil* quality in the ſubject in which it reſides. But then, this ſuppoſes that there is *ſomething in nature* which renders an offender the *proper object* of mercy, for otherwiſe mercifulneſs could not be a perfection, nor unmercifulneſs an imperfection in nature. Beſides, to ſuppoſe a perfection to take place in nature, and at the ſame time to ſuppoſe that there is nothing in nature which correſponds with, and is the ground of * that perfection, is the ſame groſs abſurdity as to ſuppoſe an effect without a cauſe. And if there is ſomething in nature which renders an offender the proper object of mercy, (which muſt needs be the caſe) then, to ſhew *mercy* to *ſuch an offender* muſt be *right* and *fit*, for that very reaſon, namely, becauſe he, *viz.* the offender, is become the *ſuitable* and *proper object* of ſuch mercy. And to be *unmerciful* to *ſuch an offender* as has rendered himſelf the proper object of mercy, by puniſhing him according to the demerit of his crime, muſt be *wrong* and *blame-worthy*, for the very ſame reaſon, *viz.* becauſe by his becoming the proper object of mercy he *ceaſed* to be the proper object of puniſhment, and therefore, to puniſh ſuch an offender muſt be *wrong*. An offender,

* By *perfection* here is meant *moral perfection*.

by his *offence*, becomes the *proper object* of puniſhment, and muſt *continue* ſo to be, till he has *ſuffered* the puniſhment his crime deſerves, or till ſomething takes place in him which renders him the *proper object* of mercy; and when *either* of theſe take place, then he *ceaſes* to be the proper object of puniſhment. I ſay, when either of theſe take place, becauſe when the offender has rendered himſelf the *proper object* of mercy, and *as far* as he has done ſo, then he thereby *ceaſes* to be the proper object of puniſhment, *as much* as he would, by his ſuffering in whole, or in part, the puniſhment his crime deſerved. I here put the caſe, when the offender has rendered himſelf the proper object of mercy, and *as far* as he has done ſo; becauſe, poſſibly, * an offender may become the proper object of mercy *in part*, that is, ſuch circumſtances may attend him as may render it reaſonable that his puniſhment ſhould be *abated*, but not wholly taken away. This muſt be the caſe, except we admit that an offender can be the proper object of mercy to the *full*, and of puniſhment to the *full*, at the *ſame time*, which is an apparent contradiction; becauſe *mercy* conſiſts in the *remiſſion* of puniſhment. So that it is not the ſhewing mercy to *any*, or to *all offenders*, without any rule or reaſon; but only to

* I here admit the ſuppoſition that an offender may become the proper object of mercy only in part, but do not take upon me to maintain either ſide of the queſtion.

to *ſuch* as have rendered themſelves the *proper objects* of mercy, which is *right*, *fit*, *commendable*, and *praiſe-worthy*. If to ſhew mercy to *all offenders*, without regarding that which renders the offender the proper object of mercy were *right* and *fit*, then the conſequence will be, that there will be no *puniſhment* in *futurity*; becauſe we may well be aſſured that God will not puniſh where the reaſon of the thing requires that he ſhould ſhew mercy. And, on the other ſide, if to puniſh *all offenders equal* to their *crimes*, without regarding that which renders the offender the proper object of mercy were *right* and *fit*, then the conſequence will be, that there will be no *mercy* ſhewn in *futurity*; becauſe God will not ſhew mercy where the reaſon of the thing requires that he ſhould puniſh, which is the preſent caſe. But the truth lies betwixt thoſe extreams. For, as God will puniſh *ſuch offenders* as continue to be, notwithſtanding his patience and long-ſuffering towards them, the *proper objects* of puniſhment; ſo he will certainly ſhew *mercy* to *all ſuch offenders* as have rendered themſelves the *ſuitable* and *proper* objects of it.

Thus, I think, I have fully ſtated the notion of mercy, and ſhewed what idea we annex to that term, in the preſent caſe. The next thing to be conſidered, is what there is in nature which can, and does, render an offender the *proper object* of *mercy*.

Mercy,

Mercy, in the preſent caſe, takes place of *juſtice*, and ſuperſedes or ſets aſide *puniſhment*. Juſtice, in the preſent caſe, is the ballance of common equity, by which is weighed out or diſpenſed *rewards* and *puniſhments*, in an *equal proportion* to the *good* or *evil*, the *virtuouſneſs* or *viciouſneſs* of mens actions. And, that I may keep the argument clear of all incumbrances, and thereby guard againſt captious oppoſers, I will ſtate the notion of *rewards* and *puniſhments*, and of *good* and *evil actions* as the foundation of them. Thoſe words *reward* and *puniſh* are relative, the former is a relative to ſome paſt good action or merit, the latter is a relative to ſome paſt evil action or guilt. For though in a looſe and popular way of ſpeaking *all favours* may be called *rewards*, and *all afflictions* may be called *puniſhments*, (as a man by ſuffering great *pain* in a fit of the gout may be ſaid to ſuffer great *puniſhment* thereby) yet, ſtrictly ſpeaking, no favours nor afflictions come under the denomination of *rewards* and *puniſhments*, but ſuch only as have had ſome *good* or *evil* actions, done by the *receiver*, to be the ground and foundation of them. If the ſettled price of labour be *one ſhilling* per day, and a man labours a day for me, and if I pay the labourer *one ſhilling*, that pay is properly called *reward*; becauſe there was ſomething done by the receiver *relative* to reward, which was the ground of that *pay*, and which therefore gives

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it that denomination. But if a man's *preſſing neceſſity*, and not any precedent ſervice done me, ſhould excite me to put *a ſhilling* into his hand, in order to *ſupply* that neceſſity, this action would properly come under the denomination of a *gift*, and not of a reward; becauſe there was nothing in the receiver, relative to reward, to be the ground of that action, which could bring it under that denomination. And, as there muſt be a precedent good action or ſome ſervice done, to be a foundation for reward; ſo that action or ſervice muſt be done by the *receiver*, and not by another, to conſtitute what he receives a reward. If *one man* ſhould perform a day's labour for me, and I ſhould deliver a ſhilling to *another*, he that received it would not be rewarded thereby; becauſe there was nothing in him, *relative* to reward, to be the ground of it, which could give the action that denomination. Again, If a man, by a fall from his horſe, ſhould break a limb, or otherwiſe ſuffer great pain thereby, this would be a very *great affliction* to that man; and yet it would not come under the denomination of *puniſhment*, becauſe there was no *precedent evil action* in him, (which is the *relative* to puniſhment) that was the ground of the affliction, which could give it that denomination. But if a man ſhould *ſteal* an *horſe*, and ſhould be ſentenced to death or baniſhment for it; the *execution* of that ſentence would properly come under the denomination of *puniſhment*, becauſe there

there was a precedent evil action or guilt in him, which is the *relative* to puniſhment, that was the ground of that ſentence, and therefore would bring it under that denomination. And, as there muſt be ſome precedent evil action or guilt, to be the ground of puniſhment; ſo that evil action muſt be done, and that guilt muſt be attracted by the *ſufferer only*, and not by another, to conſtitute any affliction *puniſhment*. If *one man* ſhould *ſteal* an *horſe*, and *another man*, known to be innocent with regard to that fact, ſhould be *hanged*; in that caſe, tho' the perſon hanged would ſuffer one of the greateſt of *natural evils*, yet that ſuffering would not be a *puniſhment* to him, becauſe he had no *precedent guilt*, which is the *relative* to puniſhment, to be the ground of that ſuffering, and therefore, it could not come under the denomination of *puniſhment* to him. And, as to the *guilt* that was contracted by the *other*, it could not poſſibly alter the caſe with reſpect to *him*; becauſe *he* could not poſſibly become *guilty* thereby. And, ſuppoſing the innocent perſon ſhould, not only *conſent* to be hanged, but ſhould *voluntarily offer himſelf* to ſuffer, in order to ſave the guilty; this would not alter the caſe at all, becauſe ſuch *conſent* and *voluntary offer* could not poſſibly make him *guilty* of the other's crime, and where there is no guilt there can be no puniſhment; it being the ſame groſs abſurdity to ſuppoſe puniſhment without crime, as it is to ſuppoſe a ſon without a father. And, to

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ſuppoſe that puniſhment may be transferred from one perſon to another, when guilt, which is the ground of it, cannot, is the ſame groſs abſurdity. How idle then muſt it be for men to pretend that the *innocent Jeſus bore the puniſhment* that was due for the *ſins of mankind?* I ſay how vain muſt ſuch a pretence be? For, as it was impoſſible that Chriſt ſhould be *guilty* of our *crimes*; ſo it was equally as impoſſible that he ſhould *ſuffer* the *puniſhment* due for them. Again, the *good* or *evil*, or the *merit* or *demerit* of actions, which is the ground and foundation of rewards and puniſhments, does not ariſe from the good or evil *effects* and *conſequences* of thoſe actions, but from the good or evil *motive* or *principle* they ſpring from, ſuppoſe the action of another, by *mere accident* and without any deſign of the agent, ſhould become very *beneficial* to me, in this caſe, tho' the action in it's effect and conſequence would be a *natural good* to me; yet it would not be a *moral good* in the actor, becauſe it's being a good to me was not the produce of his inclination and will, and therefore, it could not be a proper foundation for *reward*. Whereas, if that good to me was *intended* by the agent, and I was the *proper object* of his regard, then it would be a *moral good* in the actor, and he would be worthy of a *reward* upon the account of it. Again, if a man, by *mere accident* and without any deſign, ſhould take away the *life* of another; in this caſe, tho' the action in it's effect and conſequence would be the

greateſt of *natural evils* to the man who loſt his life by it, yet it would not be a *moral evil* in the agent, becauſe it was not the produce of any *evil* or *vicious* inclination in him, and conſequently, he could not contract *guilt* to himſelf by it, nor be worthy of *puniſhment* on the account of it. Whereas, if he *intended* that evil to a man, without any *juſt ground* to inflict it, he would be guilty of *moral evil*, and be worthy of puniſhment. And, tho' an *evil diſpoſition* does not, I think, conſtitute *guilt*, until it becomes the ground and foundation of *action*, or, at leaſt, until it is *intended* to be ſo; yet, I think, it is the *evil diſpoſition only* which communicates *guilt* to the action, if I may ſo ſpeak, or in other words, it is the evil diſpoſition that renders the action *vicious* and *blameworthy* which is produced by it. So that the merit and demerit of actions, by which they become the ground and foundation of rewards and puniſhments, reſult not from their effects and conſequences, but from their cauſes.

But to return, juſtice, (as I obſerved above) is the ballance of common equity, by which is weighed out or diſpenſed rewards and puniſhments, in equal proportion to the merit or demerit of mens actions. Juſtice, in the adminiſtration of rewards, is the *mean* betwixt bounty and fraud. He who rewards the labourer *equal* to the value of his labour, is *juſt*. He who rewards the labourer *below* it's value, defrauds him, and thereby is *criminally* unjuſt. He who rewards the labourer *above* the

the value of his labour, is *bountiful* to him, and thereby is *virtuouſly* unjuſt, provided there be a *laudable reaſon* for that bounty. So that he who rewards *above* the merit of an action, is as *truly unjuſt*, as he who rewards *below* it; but then, *injuſtice* in one inſtance is *vicious* and *blame-worthy*, whereas *injuſtice* in the other inſtance may be *virtuous* and *commendable*. Again, juſtice, in the adminiſtration of puniſhment, is the *mean* betwixt mercy and cruelty. He (as I obſerved above) who puniſhes the offender *equal* to his crime, is *juſt*. He who lays upon the offender a *greater* puniſhment than his crime deſerves, is *cruel*; that is, he is *criminally* unjuſt. He who *remits* that puniſhment, in whole, or in part, is *merciful*; that is, he is *virtuouſly* unjuſt, provided there be a *laudable reaſon* for the exerciſe of that mercy. So that he who puniſhes *below* the demerit of a vicious action, is as *truly unjuſt*, as he who puniſhes *above* it; but then, *injuſtice* in the latter caſe is a *vice*, and ought to be *avoided*, whereas *injuſtice* in the former inſtance is a *virtue* and *truly commendable*, provided there be ſome *laudable reaſon* for the exerciſe of that mercy. So that juſtice is *right* and *fit* only when it comes in competition with *criminal* injuſtice; but when it comes in competition with *virtuous* injuſtice, and is preferred before it, by puniſhing the criminal equal to the demerit of his crimes, when he has rendered himſelf the proper object of mercy, then, and under theſe circumſtances, *juſtice* degene-

rates into *unmercifulneſs*, and is in itſelf truly *blame-worthy*. I ſay, juſtice itſelf is blameworthy in *ſuch caſes* where there is a *laudable reaſon* for the exerciſing of *mercy* to the criminal, and what that laudable reaſon is comes now to be conſidered.

I have already obſerved, that puniſhment is relative to guilt, the latter of theſe being the ground and foundation of the former. I have likewiſe obſerved that actions derive their guilt, not from their effects and conſequences, but from their cauſes; that is, from thoſe evil or vicious diſpoſitions of mind which are the ground and cauſe of them. I here farther obſerve, that when *once* guilt is contracted, it can never be *taken away*; that is, when *once* an evil action has been committed, that action cannot be *undone*, nor can it ever be otherwiſe but an evil action, and conſequently, the perſon who committed it muſt continue to *have been* guilty of that evil action to all eternity, or, at leaſt, ſo long as he ſhall continue to exiſt. And this is the caſe upon *all ſchemes*, whether the criminal ſuffers the puniſhment his crime deſerves, or whether we admit the abſurd ſuppoſition of another's ſuffering in his ſtead, or whether his puniſhment be remitted, in whole, or in part. But then, tho' an evil action cannot be *undone*, but muſt continue to *have been* committed to all eternity; yet that *evil diſpoſition of mind* out of which it ſprang may be *put away*, and when that is the caſe, then, he that before was the *proper object* of puniſhment,

puniſhment, by this *ceaſes* to be ſuch, and becomes thereby the *proper object* of mercy. For as in things *natural*, take away the cauſe, and the effect *will* ceaſe; ſo in things *moral*, take away the cauſe; and the effect *ought* to ceaſe. A man in a ſtate of *poverty* is the *proper object* of relief, and therefore *ought* to be relieved: But then, take away the cauſe, and the effect *ought* to ceaſe; that is change his circumſtances by putting him into a ſtate of *plenty*, and then he *ceaſes* to be the proper object of relief, and therefore *ought not* to be relieved. In like manner, a man who from a *wicked diſpoſition of mind* has been guilty of a wicked action, becomes thereby the *proper object* of puniſhment; but then, take away the cauſe, and the effect *ought* to ceaſe, that is, change his circumſtances by removing that *wicked diſpoſition* which took place in him, and which was the *ground* of his miſbehaviour, and then he *ceaſes* to be the proper object of puniſhment, and *becomes thereby* the proper object of mercy. For when the *grounds* of reſentment and puniſhment *ceaſe*, which is the caſe here, then, in reaſon and equity, reſentment and puniſhment *ought* to *ceaſe* alſo. And it would be the ſame abſurd conduct, to *puniſh* a man after he is become a *penitent*, for his having *before* been *guilty* of an evil action; as it would be to *relieve* a man in a *ſtate of plenty*, for his having *before* been in a *ſtate of poverty*. This *change* of *circumſtances* in an offender, *changes* his *character* and *relations*. For, whilſt he was under the

power

power of vicious affections, and was diſpoſed to gratify them to the publick hurt, he was then an *evil* or *vicious creature*, and an enemy to the intelligent and moral world, and, as ſuch, was the *proper object* of reſentment and puniſhment. But when he became *changed* as aforeſaid, he then *ceaſed* to be that *vicious* or *evil creature*, and is become *virtuous* and *good*, he is no longer an enemy, but a friend and a benefactor to the intelligent world as far as it is in his power ſo to be, and, as ſuch, he is no longer the proper object of *reſentment* and *puniſhment*, but is become, by the *forementioned change*, the proper object of *compaſſion* and *mercy*. So that if the Deity will follow nature, and be guided by it, (which he moſt certainly will) then, he muſt deal with ſuch a creature according to what *he is*, and not according to what he *has been*; he muſt deal with him, not as an *offender*, conſidered *ſimply as ſuch*, which would render him the proper object of *puniſhment*, this not being his *whole character*; but he muſt and will treat him as a *penitent offender*, that being his *whole character*, and the *preſent* ſtate of his caſe, and, as ſuch, he is the proper object of God's *mercy*. To ſay in this caſe, that the penitent offender *ſtill continues* to have been guilty of the crimes he has committed, and therefore, he *ought* to be *puniſhed*, this is weakly urged; becauſe, (as I have already obſerved) that is the caſe upon *all ſchemes*, and therefore, it ought not to be urged here; and is the ſame kind of

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reaſoning as to ſay, that the man who has been in a ſtate of poverty, tho' his circumſtances are changed, and he is now in a ſtate of plenty; yet he *ſtill continues* to be the man who has been in a ſtate of poverty, and therefore *ſtill* ought to be relieved; the weakneſs of which, I think, appears at firſt ſight.

From what I have obſerved, I think, my reader cannot avoid ſeeing what it is which renders men, who have, by their greatly departing from that rule of action they ought to be governed by, rendered themſelves juſtly diſpleaſing to their Maker; I ſay, I think, my reader cannot avoid ſeeing what it is which will render *ſuch offenders* the *proper objects* of God's *mercy*; and conſequently, will be the *ground* of the divine *mercy* to them. Namely, it is paſſing through *ſuch a change*, which, (to ſpeak in the figurative language of the New Teſtament) is called a *being born again*, becoming a *new creature*; being *created a new*, in, or according to Chriſt Jeſus; and the like. Whatever offender paſſes through *this change*, he thereby *ceaſes* to be the proper object of *puniſhment*, and becomes the proper object of *mercy*; and therefore, we may be aſſured, he will moſt certainly obtain it at God's hand. I am not here enquiring what is, or may be, the *ground* or *reaſon* of remitting puniſhment *amongſt men*, which, perhaps, ſometimes is relation, friendſhip, precedent obligations, and the like. Theſe cannot take place with reſpect to God, and therefore, *whether*, and

how

how far they may be *juſtifiable* grounds of remitting puniſhment amongſt men, does not come into the preſent queſtion. I have already obſerved that the law of nature is a *perfect law*, as it is a rule of action in all *inſtances* and *caſes*, and under *all* poſſible circumſtance in which a law or rule of action is wanting. And, for as much as *nature* has pointed out a *plain* and an *obvious rule* in the preſent caſe, by ſhewing *who*, and *who only*, are the proper objects of mercy to the Deity: So we may be *as certain*, as we are that God is, that he will govern his conduct, in this particular, by this rule. And, that what I have before laid down is the truth of the caſe, is, I think, as plain and obvious as any thing in nature or reaſon can poſſibly be. Here then is a plain obvious rule by which every great offender may judge whether he is become truly religious, or not; and whether he ſhall moſt certainly obtain God's mercy, or not. If he has paſſed through *that change* which we uſually call *repentance*, and is become in truth and ſincerity a *virtuous good man*; then, he will, moſt certainly, obtain *mercy* and *acceptance* at the hand of his Maker. But if he ſtill retains his *vicious wicked diſpoſition* of mind, and would *follow* that diſpoſition, in the practice of every vileneſs, were he not reſtrained from it, either in hope of a reward, or for fear of puniſhment, or from ſome other ſelfiſh conſideration, as, in ſuch a caſe, he is in truth a *vicious wicked man*, whatever his outward behaviour may be:

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So he is likewiſe an *irreligious* man, and the *proper object* of God's diſpleaſure. And, as *true religion*, in the preſent caſe, conſiſts in the forementioned *change* or *renovation of mind*, and in a *change of life* conſequent upon it (for make the tree good and the fruit will be good alſo): So every thing *beſide* this change which is repreſented to be the *ground* of God's *mercy*, muſt be *falſe religion*. I ſay, every thing beſide the forementioned change which is repreſented to be the ground of God's mercy, muſt be falſe religion; becauſe it is the forementioned *change*, and *that only*, which renders ſinners the *proper objects* of *mercy*, and therefore, it is that change, and that only, which can poſſibly be the *ground* or *reaſon* of God's mercy to them. This is the ſtate of the caſe independent of any revelation or promulged law; and when conſidered in the abſtract nature and reaſon of things.

And now I expect it will be ſaid that I am greatly *undervaluing* the undertaking and ſufferings of Chriſt, and that upon my principles mankind had *no need* of a Saviour and a Redeemer; this, and ſuch like, probably, the ignorant and the artful will be buzzing in the ears of the people, and will be objecting to my readers. Upon which I obſerve, that as I would by no means *leſſen* or *detract* from the *real value* of Chriſt's undertaking and ſufferings, by repreſenting them to be the produce of *ſelfiſhneſs* in him, *viz.* that he ſought himſelf, and purſued his own intereſt in what

he did, as St *Paul* ſeems to have repreſented the caſe to be, when he ſaid, that *for the joy that was ſet before him, he endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame*, and, (in conſequence thereof) *is ſat down on the right-hand of the Majeſty on high*; I ſay, as I would by no means thus detract from the value and merit of Chriſt's undertaking and ſufferings: So, on the other ſide, I durſt not *complement* theſe with what does not belong to them, and to which they can no way ſtand related. And, this leads me to put the queſtion, what connection, what relation, what affinity, what analogy, is there betwixt the *ſins* and *offences* of mankind, and the *ſufferings* and *death* of Jeſus Chriſt? And the anſwer is obvious, *viz.* there is none at all. Man is, by nature, an *accountable creature*, who is anſwerable to God for his behaviour. And as all merit and guilt is *perſonal*, and cannot poſſibly be *transferred* from one agent to another: So, according to all the rules of juſtice, equity, and reaſon, the righteouſneſs of the righteous *ought*, and *will* be upon *him*, and upon *him only*; and the wickedneſs of the wicked *ought*, and *will* be upon *him*, and upon *him only*. That the father *ought not*, nor *will he* bear the iniquity of the ſon, nor the ſon the iniquity of the father. That the ſoul that ſinneth *ſhall*, and *will die*, except he *repent* and *return to his duty*, by doing that which is lawful and right, and that then he will moſt aſſuredly ſave his ſoul alive. That, if a man does *well*, then he will

will be *approved* and *accepted* of God; but if a man does *evil*, then the *puniſhment* due to his ſin lieth at the door, and will moſt certainly lay hold of him, except his *repentance* and *reformation* (which renders him the proper object of mercy) prevent it. Theſe are the ways of *righteouſneſs* and *equity*, and theſe are the *righteous* and *equitable* ways of God. For, tho' the *houſe* of *Iſrael* walked by *other rules*; yet *theſe*, and *theſe only*, are the *rules* that the *God* of *Iſrael* walks by, and that conſtantly, uniformly, and everlaſtingly. *Yet ye*, (the houſe of Iſrael) *ſay, the way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now O houſe of* Iſrael, *is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?* ſaith the Lord of hoſts, *Ezek.* xviii. 25. Now, if theſe are the ways of *truth* and *reaſon*, of *juſtice* and *equity*, as moſt certainly they are, then the queſtion will return as above, *viz.* what *connection*, what *relation* is there betwixt the *offences* of *men* and the *ſufferings* of *Chriſt?* And the anſwer will be as before, *viz.* it plainly appears that theſe have no connection with, no relation to each other at all. Mankind were greatly *corrupted* and *degenerated*, as to their underſtandings, their affections, and actions; and under *theſe circumſtances*, God, out of his abundant goodneſs, ſent his Son our Lord Jeſus Chriſt to be their *Saviour*. That is, Jeſus Chriſt was ſent to appriſe mankind of their danger, and to point out to them the only certain way by which they might eſcape it, and ſecure to themſelves the divine favour.

And, in the proſecution of this deſign, our Lord fell into *wicked hands*, by which he was *crucified* and *ſlain*. And, out of this *ſcene* of *action*, viz. the crucifixion and death of Chriſt, ſome of his followers have extracted the moſt *profound myſteries*, than which nothing in *paganiſm* was more *abſurd* or *ridiculous*.

I am ſenſible, it is commonly urged, that ſatisfaction muſt have been made to the juſtice of God for the ſins of mankind, otherwiſe God could not have exerciſed his mercy in the forgiveneſs of our ſins; and that ſuch ſatisfaction was made by the death and ſufferings of Chriſt. Good God! how abſurd? how inconſiſtent is this? juſtice, conſidered abſtractedly, is not an agent or perſon, but only a property or quality, if it may be ſo called; and therefore, when men talk of making ſatisfaction to the *juſtice* of God, they muſt mean, (if they talk ſenſe) making ſatisfaction to a *juſt God*, or rather God muſt *act juſtly* by demanding and receiving, or by making himſelf full ſatisfaction in the caſe. But then, this is a caſe in which *ſatisfaction* cannot poſſibly take place; becauſe where there is *no injury* done, there can be *no ſatisfaction* made: But God is not injured, in the leaſt degree, by our ſins, and therefore, he cannot poſſibly receive any ſatisfaction. God is indeed *offended* at, but not *injured* by our miſcarriages, or rather he is *diſpleaſed* with us on account of the *evil diſpoſitions* that take place in us, which are the *ground* and *cauſe* of thoſe miſcarriages, and this

this is a *juſt ground* of *reſentment* to him, which reſentment may be removed, either by our ſuffering *equal* to the demerit of our crimes, or by our rendering our ſelves the *objects* of his mercy; but then, this is a caſe in which *ſatisfaction* is quite out of the queſtion. Again, if we admit the abſurdity of ſatisfaction, it will involve us in another abſurdity. For, ſuppoſing *full ſatisfaction* be made to God for the *ſins* of mankind; then, this would be ſo far from making way for the exerciſe of God's *mercy*, that, on the contrary, it would *ſuperſede* it and ſet it quite aſide. Mercy and juſtice, in the preſent caſe, are *incompatible*. If juſtice takes place, mercy cannot. Juſtice conſiſts in paying the *full* debt, or in puniſhing *equal* to the demerit of the crime; and when that is done there can be no place for *mercy*, becauſe mercy conſiſts in *remitting* that very puniſhment. Again, if mercy takes place, then juſtice cannot. Mercy conſiſts in the *remitting* of puniſhment, (as was ſaid before) and when that is done there can be no place for the *execution* of *juſtice*, becauſe juſtice conſiſts in the *inflicting* that very puniſhment which is ſuppoſed to be *remitted*. I have already obſerved, that the execution of juſtice is only *commendable* when it ſtands oppoſed to, and takes place of *criminal* injuſtice; and that when it comes in competition with, and takes place of *mercy*, then it becomes *blameable*, provided the perſon on whom it is exerciſed be the *proper object* of mercy.

So

So that were the Deity to execute juſtice upon *ſuch* an offender as has rendered himſelf the *proper object* of mercy, this would not be a *perfection*, but an *imperfection* in him. It would be endleſs were I to go about to *unravel* and *expoſe* all that *abſurdity* and *nonſenſe* that this ſubject is incumbred with; and therefore, I ſhall not attempt it.

I will only farther obſerve, that as our Lord Jeſus Chriſt is called our *Redeemer:* So this title is grounded on the language of the *New Teſtament*, in which Chriſt is ſaid to have *redeemed* his people to God by his *blood*, and that they have *redemption* through his *blood*, and the like. Here the queſtion will be, whether the redemption applied to Chriſt be *literal*, or only *figurative*. By a *literal* redemption, I apprehend, the *purchaſing* the *freedom* of a *captive*, by paying down a *price* or valuable conſideration, to the captive's maſter, for his *liberty*; which valuable conſideration is called the *price* of that *redemption*. So that in a *literal redemption* there muſt be a *literal ſlave*, and a *literal maſter*, and a *literal price* paid down to that maſter, for the purchaſing a *literal freedom*, to that literal ſlave; but none of theſe take place in the *redemption* applied to *Chriſt*, and therefore, that redemption cannot be *literal*, but only *figurative*, and conſequently, all the *expreſſions* and *paſſages* in the New Teſtament relating thereto, muſt of neceſſity be underſtood not in a *literal* but in a *figurative* ſenſe. If it ſhould be aſked,

how

how is all that figurative language to be underſtood? Anſwer, it is a queſtion that I am not particularly concerned in. And as the entering into it would of courſe introduce an endleſs wrangling controverſy; ſo that is a ſufficient reaſon to me not to meddle with it. It is ſufficient to my purpoſe that all the *expreſſions* and *paſſages* referred to are plainly and evidently *figures* of *ſpeech*, and as ſuch they are not proper foundations to build doctrines of importance upon, (as I have already obſerved) eſpecially if thoſe doctrines are plainly *repugnant* to the eternal reaſon and truth of things, which is the preſent caſe. But then, if the redemption wrought out by Chriſt be not literal, but only figurative, the queſtion will be, *how*, or in *what way*, is it that Chriſt has been a *Saviour* and a *Redeemer* to mankind? Anſwer, this point is largely and fully conſidered in my book entitled *The true Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt aſſerted*, (already publiſhed) to which I refer my reader for ſatisfaction.

Thus I have gone through what I propoſed, and have, I think, plainly ſhewed that *religion is founded in nature*; that is, there is a *right* and *wrong*, a *true* and *falſe religion* in *nature*; and that nature or reaſon affords ſome plain and obvious principles by which a man may *diſtinguiſh* theſe, and form a *proper judgment* in the preſent caſe; and which an honeſt upright man may *ſafely* and *ſecurely* ſtay his mind upon. I have, at the beginning of this work obſerved, that the various

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and different characters of men are in part occaſioned by *religion*, as religion has a great influence upon their *affections* and *actions*; and conſequently, not only their *future*, but alſo their *preſent* happineſs and miſery is greatly affected thereby. For, as the practice of *true religion* lays a *ſure foundation* for a bleſſed eternity; ſo it is the *beſt* and *ſafeſt way* to happineſs now. And, as *falſe religion* will *diſappoint* mans hopes with reſpect to another world; ſo, in a multitude of caſes, it *contributes greatly* to their unhappineſs in this. It is therefore a matter of great concern that men ſhould have *juſt* and *true* notions of religion; becauſe their preſent and future well being greatly depends upon it. I have contributed my mite towards this work, and, I truſt, it has not altogether been in vain. And, though religion has been, and ſtill is *greatly controverted* in the world; yet, I think, men may come to *a certainty* with reſpect to it. Religion is not an arbitrary inſtitution, founded on ſoveraign pleaſure; but it is grounded on the eternal reaſon and truth of things, as I have largely ſhewn in the precedent enquiry; and therefore, it admits of equal certainty with every thing of like kind. True religion has no dependance upon *language*; that is, upon the uſe and ſenſe and derivation of words. For, as religion is what every individual of our ſpecies is greatly intereſted in, whether he be high or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned; ſo it muſt, in *reaſon*

and

and *equity*, be level to the capacities of all; and therefore, cannot depend upon niceties and trifles. Learning indeed has it's uſe to men of leiſure and abilities; but then, it generally does more miſchief than good with relation to religion, becauſe it ſerves to darken and perplex that which is in itſelf plain and clear, and which ought ſo to be preſerved to the people. If a religion is at any time promulged, under a *divine character*; and if what is delivered concerning it, be put into *writing*; then, the *language* it *firſt* appeared in gives *great men* a fair occaſion and opportunity to ſhew their *learning* and *abilities*, and to make their *advantages* upon it. This is plainly the caſe of what is uſually called the Chriſtian Revelation, and the Chriſtian Religion, or, to ſpeak more properly, that promulgation of the original and primary law of nature, which was made to mankind by the miniſtry of Jeſus Chriſt. The *language* which this revelation *firſt* appeared in, like all other languages, has given *great* and *learned men* an opportunity of ſhewing their *dexterity*, by turning what was *firſt* promulged to mankind into *any* and *every ſhape*. Theſe men make *Chriſtianity* to be *Popery*, and to be *Proteſtantiſm*; to be *this thing* and *that thing*; to be *any thing* and to be *every thing*. And indeed this muſt be the caſe of all *traditionary* religion, whether in it's original promulgation it were *true*, or *falſe*. A religion grounded on *revelation*, if it is to be *propagated*, of courſe introduces

Tranſcribers, Tranſlators, Commentators, Expounders, and the like. And theſe, through the weakneſs of ſome, and the wickedneſs of others, introduce that *great variety* and *contrariety*, that *confuſion* and *perpexity*, as we ſee at this day. And this, (as I ſaid before) muſt, and will be the caſe of all *traditionary* religion, whether in it's *firſt* promulgation it were of God, or not; and whether thoſe who *firſt* committed it to writing were divinely inſpired, or not. How *neceſſary* and *deſirable* a thing muſt it therefore be, that there ſhould be ſome *plain, obvious, certain principles* in nature or reaſon to be a *ſolid foundation* for religion, which honeſt upright men may *ſafely* and *ſecurely* ſtay their minds upon, amidſt that diverſity and perplexity which all traditionary religion is liable to, and is conſtantly attended with; and this, to our ſatisfaction and comfort, is the truth of the caſe. *True religion*, when conſidered *abſtractedly* from what may be made the outward ſigns and tokens of it, from what may be uſed as means and helps to it, and from what may be annexed to and blended with it, is not liable to ſuch *toſſings* and *changes*. For, as it is *grounded* on the eternal reaſon and truth of things; ſo it muſt of neceſſity be *the ſame*, both yeſterday, to day, and for ever. And, indeed, it would be a very hard caſe, were *true religion* (which is of *univerſal* concern to mankind) to depend upon the *ſenſe* and *derivation* of words, the underſtanding of which,

which, men of letters are apt to boaſt of, and value themſelve upon; ſeeing *words*, with regard to their *ſenſe* and *derivation*, like ſhittlecocks, are liable to be *battled to* and *from*, according to the art and ſkill of the opponents. And, though this is what many learned men would fain have the caſe appear to be, becauſe then, *they only* would be capable judges concerning it; yet the truth is, true religion is not of ſo *light* and *airy* a nature, but is more *ſolid*, as being grounded on *eternal reaſon* and *truth*, (as I have already obſerved) and therefore admits of *no alteration*, and is to be diſcerned and judged of by every man, whether he has learning, or not.

To conclude: I obſerve, that I have not reaſoned from general and received opinions, nor from the ſentiments of great and learned men, in any age, or ages, nor from any other kind of authority, nor indeed from any *uncertain* and *precarious hypotheſis* whatever; but only from ſuch principles as are founded on *the eternal reaſon* and *truth of things*. So that ſkill in criticiſm, in hiſtory, in arts and ſciences, is not wanted here; but a capacity and attention ſufficient to diſcern and diſtinguiſh betwixt juſt and ſolid arguments and reaſonings and their contraries, ſuch ability and application being neceſſary to render a perſon a proper judge of what I have laid down; and therefore, I appeal to all thoſe of ſuperior abilities, of greater attention, and quicker diſcernment, as the beſt judges in the preſent

caſe. But then, as to the *Horlers* or *Tumpeters* of the age, who ſound an alarm of danger, and *call to arms* the whole *Eccleſiaſtical Soldiery* to wage war with me, who are much better qualified to *ſing a love ſong*, and to *dance a horn-pipe*, than to reaſon upon queſtions of ſo important and ſerious a nature; and alſo to all our ſyſtematical Divines, Preachers, Writers, and Diſputers, their judgments, ſurely, muſt be of leſs weight in the caſe under conſideration. Nevertheleſs, though I have appealed as above; yet, I am ſenſible, that great men, who have obtained popular applauſe, are uſually very careful not to turn the tables and bring upon themſelves popular odium; and therefore, when *popular errors*, that is, errors which have been generally received as important truths, when ſuch errors are brought upon the *carpet*, and are under *examination*, great men ſeldom come *openly*, *plainly*, and *fully* into the defence of truth; eſpecially if there be ſomething in view worth *rowing* * *for*, and if there be a proſpect of obtaining it; I ſay, under theſe circumſtances, great men ſeldom come openly, plainly, and fully into the defence of truth. Indeed, there are *ſome inſtances* of great men, who, when not engaged in controverſy, have acted *bravely* and *boldly* in aſſerting truths not greatly popular.

* *Rowing* here alludes to the print, in which *three* Biſhops were repreſented as *rowing hard* for *Lambeth*, otherwiſe the Archbiſhoprick of *Canterbury*, though, (by *the way*) *they* all three loſt it.

pular. Thus for example, Dr *Sherlocke*, by the King's ordinance now Lord Biſhop of *Saliſbury*, in a Sermon preached before the Society for propagating the goſpel in Foreign Parts, (pages 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.) hath expreſſed himſelf in the following manner.

'I ſhall now proceed to lay before you ſuch 'conſequences as ſeem to me to be the na-'tural reſult of this method made uſe of by 'our bleſſed Lord and his Apoſtles, in pub-'liſhing the goſpel to mankind.'

'And the firſt is this: that the religion of 'the goſpel is the true original religion of 'reaſon and nature.'

'This appears, by conſidering the nature 'of that repentance, which our Lord, and 'thoſe who came after him in the miniſtry of 'the goſpel, preached to the world: repen-'tance ſuppoſes a tranſgreſſion, and tranſgreſ-'ſion ſuppoſes a law; for as the Apoſtle ar-'gues, *where there is no law there is no tranſ-'greſſion:* and ſince repentance conſiſts in a 'change of mind, in rectifying what was be-'fore amiſs, and in fulfilling that obedience 'which was before wanting; it is evident, 'that to repent of the violation of any law, 'is to return to the obedience of it: and he 'that exhorts and calls you to repentance, 'calls you back to the obedience of that law, 'againſt which you had offended. The que-'ſtion then is, againſt what law thoſe offences 'were committed, the repentance for which 'was ſo neceſſary, that without it there was

'no

'no admittance into the fellowſhip of the 'goſpel of Chriſt? The laws of the goſpel, 'conſidered as ſuch, are evidently excluded 'upon the preſent view; for repentance being 'the firſt thing every where taught, and an-'tecedently to the publication of any of the 'rules and precepts of the goſpel, the law not 'yet publiſhed could not be the rule of that 'repentance, which related to ſins already 'committed. At the time of the publication 'of the goſpel, there were many forms and 'inſtitutions of religion ſubſiſting in the world; 'but as theſe were very different from one 'another, inſomuch that if ſome were true, 'others were certainly falſe; ſo they could 'not be the ground of that repentance, which 'being generally taught to all the world, to 'the *Gentile* as well as the *Jew*, muſt reſpect 'ſome general law, which related alike to all, 'and the obligations to which were in ſome 'degrees univerſally felt and acknowleged: 'and this can be no other than that which 'the Apoſtle to the *Romans* has deſcribed in 'the ſecond chapter, ver. 14, 15, *when the* 'Gentiles, *which have not the law, do by na-'ture the things contained in the law, theſe 'having not the law, are a law unto them-'ſelves: which ſhew the work of the law written 'in their hearts, their conſcience alſo bearing 'witneſs, and their thoughts the mean while 'accuſing or elſe excuſing one another.* How-'ever the light of reaſon and nature was 'darkened and obſcured by the ignorance

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'and ſuperſtition of the world, yet ſome re-
'mains of it were in all places to be found;
'and the general principles of religion were
'ſo rivetted in human nature, that ſhe could
'not but ſtart at any thing that directly con-
'tradicted them: Thus, for inſtance, in the
'great branch of natural religion, which re-
'lates to the worſhip and ſervice of God, tho'
'mankind had univerſally erred and defiled
'themſelves with many pollutions and abo-
'minations, yet Atheiſm was as deteſtable a
'crime in the Heathen world, as it is in
'the Chriſtian: and ſome, we know, were
'thought worthy of death, for being the
'maintainers of ſo unnatural an opinion. A
'ſenſe of the moral duties between man and
'man were better preſerved; and there are
'not many vices condemned in the goſpel,
'which were not infamous before in all
'civilized parts of the world. This general
'law, as the Apoſtle tells us, was the ground-
'work of conſcience, the teſtimony of the
'conſcience plainly ſhewing the work of the
'law to be written in the heart; and this is
'a farther evidence, that this law of nature
'was the foundation of that repentance,
'which was to uſher in the goſpel; for
'as the preacher of repentance neceſſarily re-
'fers himſelf to the conſciences of men, to
'point out to them the guilt of their actions;
'ſo muſt his doctrine neceſſarily relate to that
'law, which is the principle or origin of
'conſcience: Since then the doctrine of re-

'pentance,

'pentance, with which the goſpel ſet out in 'the world, had reference to the law of rea- 'ſon and nature, againſt which men had 'every where offended; and ſince repentance 'infers the neceſſity of a future reformation, 'and a return to that duty and obedience, 'from which by tranſgreſſion we are fallen; 'the conſequence is manifeſtly this, that the 'goſpel was a republication of the law of 'nature, and it's precepts declarative of that 'original religion, which was as old as the 'creation.'

'That this muſt certainly be the caſe, will 'appear, by conſidering the nature of the 'thing itſelf. The notions of good and evil 'are eternally and unalterably the ſame, which 'notions are the rules and meaſures of all 'moral actions, and are conſequently neceſſary 'and conſtituent parts of religion: and there- 'fore if the religion of nature, in her primi- 'tive ſtate, was pure and uncorrupt, (which 'will not, I preſume, be denied) though 'there was ſufficient reaſon for a republication 'of it, becauſe of the great ignorance and 'ſuperſtition which had grown upon the 'world, yet there could be no reaſon for any 'alteration of it; for though the world was 'the worſe for abaſing the religion of na- 'ture, and might want to be reformed by 'a divine inſtructer; yet the religion of na- 'ture was not the worſe for being abuſed, 'but ſtill retained it's firſt purity and ſim- 'plicity. The duties of religion, conſidered

'as

'as a rule of action, flow from the relation 'we bear to God, and to one another; and 'religion muſt ever be the ſame, as long as 'theſe relations continue unaltered: If our 'firſt parent was the creature of God, ſo are 'we; and whatſoever ſervice and duty he 'owed, in virtue of this dependance, the 'ſame is due from us; nor can this relation 'be ever made the ground of different duties 'in his caſe, and in ours; if therefore nature 'rightly inſtructed him at firſt how to ſerve 'his Maker, our obligations being the ſame 'with his, our rule muſt be the ſame alſo. 'The caſe is the ſame with reſpect to the 'duties owing from man to man: and it 'would be as reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the 'three angles of a triangle ſhould be equal to 'two right ones in one age, and unequal in 'another, as to ſuppoſe that the duties of re-'ligion ſhould differ in one age, from what 'they were in another, the habitudes and re-'lations from which they flow continuing al-'ways the ſame.' Again, pages 21, 22.

'It is true, the Goſpel has taught us things, 'which by nature we could not know; but 'they are all deſigned to confirm and ſtreng-'then our hope in God; it is true alſo, that 'there are ſome inſtitutions in the Goſpel, 'which in their own nature are no conſti-'tuent parts of religion, but they are ſuch 'only as are neceſſary to enable us to do our 'duty, by conveying to us new ſupplies of 'ſpiritual ſtrength. Theſe are the additions

'which the Goſpel has made to natural re-
'ligion, forgive it this injury. Our bleſſed
'Saviour ſaw that the hopes of nature were
'loſt, therefore he brought to light again life
'and immortality: he ſaw that we were cor-
'rupted, not able to reſiſt evil, and therefore
'he ſupplied the defect by the aſſiſtance of
'his holy ſpirit; pardon his care, and do not
'think the worſe of him, or his religion,
'for the great proviſion he has made in it
'for your ſecurity.'

Thus far this *great man.* However, I muſt here remind my readers, that I have not quoted from the Biſhop of *Saliſbury*'s Sermon by way of *authority*; nor indeed do I claim him as having been an *advocate* for my principles, any farther than his Lordſhip has *plainly* and *publickly* declared himſelf. Nevertheleſs, I think, I ſhould not do *juſtice* to truth, nor myſelf, did I not farther obſerve, that the *juſt reaſonings* of this *great man*, in favour of the *great* and *main points* contended for, both in the *precedent enquiry*, and in my book entitled *The true Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt aſſerted*, are more, *much more*, than a *ballance*, in point of *argument*, (which only is to be regarded) to *all* that my numerous opponents have offered againſt them. This, I ſay, is the caſe with reſpect to the great and main points I have advanced in this and the forementioned book; and as to points of leſſer moment, ſuch as how it came to paſs that when the Goſpel was firſt preached, it was not univerſally received;

ceived; and how it comes to paſs that where it has been received, it has not generally had it's proper effect upon the minds and lives of men; what I have offered upon theſe points, I have *experience* and *fact* for my vouchers. My Lord Biſhop of *Saliſbury* has expreſsly declared, that the Goſpel was *a republication of the law of nature*; and if ſo, then, the Chriſtian Religion cannot be an *arbitrary inſtitution*, grounded on *ſovereign pleaſure*, but muſt be (as I have ſaid) founded on the *eternal reaſon* and *truth* of *things*. And what additions Chriſt has made to natural religion, his Lordſhip acknowledges, are not in their own nature *conſtituent parts* of religion, but they are ſuch only as are neceſſary to *enable us* to do our duty; which, I think, is the ſame as to ſay that they are no parts of religion at all, but only *means* and *helps* to it, or, in other words, they are means and helps to make us *truly religious*, and the *proper objects* of God's favour. This indeed is what I have more *largely* and *fully* ſhewn and proved; but then, what have I, in effect, ſaid more, or leſs than this?

A.

POSTSCRIPT.

Occaſioned by the Publication of Dr STEBBING's Viſitation Charge, that had been delivered to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of *Wilts.*

POSTSCRIPT.

AFTER I had finiſhed the foregoing Enquiry, the Reverend Dr *Stebbing* publiſhed the *Viſitation Charge*, that he had before delivered to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of *Wilts*, in anſwer, (as common fame will have it) to my book entitled *The true Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt aſſerted*; the amount of which anſwer is this, *viz.* that what I have repreſented to be the true Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt is Heatheniſm, *mere Heatheniſm*. To which I reply, let it be ſo. I am not contending for words, or names, but things; and therefore, if what I have advanced be the *truth*, which I think it is, then, that is ſufficient for my purpoſe, and Dr *Stebbing* is at liberty to call it, or ſtigmatize it, by what *name* he pleaſe. However, if my principles or ſcheme of Chriſtianity be *mere Heatheniſm*, as Dr *Stebbing* hath maintained; then, as the doctrine of a *future judgment* and *retribution* is a part of that ſcheme; ſo conſequently, that doctrine, according to Dr *Stebbing*, is a part of Heatheniſm, or it is an *Heatheniſh Doctrine*; and then, according to the Doctor, the Heathens were not diſtitute of that *encouragement* to

to virtue, and *diſſwaſive* from vice, which ariſes from the conſideration of *future* rewards and puniſhments, as ſome of our Divines have too haſtily maintained that they were.

By the term *Heatheniſm*, I think, Dr *Stebbing* muſt mean *natural Religion*; and by *mere* Heatheniſm, I think, he muſt mean *pure uncorrupted* natural Religion without any mixture or addition; this, I ſay, I think, muſt be his meaning, if he has any fixed ideas to his words. And foraſmuch as the Chriſtian Religion is, (as it muſt needs be, if it be of God) the pure uncorrupted religion of nature, or as Dr *Sherlocke* the preſent Biſhop of *Saliſbury* has very juſtly and truly expreſſed it, '*The* '*Religion of the Goſpel is the true original* '*Religion of reaſon and nature*;' ſo, in this view of the caſe, mere Heatheniſm is the uncorrupted religion of *Chriſt*, or it is that religion which *Chriſt* publiſhed to the world without any mixture or addition. But then, this is putting the caſe into ſuch a light as no doubt Dr *Stebbing* never intended it ſhould appear in. True religion is not a precarious thing, founded only on ſovereign and arbitrary will; but is grounded on eternal reaſon and truth; and as ſuch it muſt be the ſame both yeſterday, to day, and for ever. And therefore, if the Chriſtian Religion be of God, (which ſurely Dr *Stebbing* will not deny) then, of neceſſity, it muſt be neither more, nor leſs, nor otherwiſe, than the true original Religion of reaſon and nature. And,

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As true Religion is founded in nature; ſo nature exhibits a proper rule of action to all intelligent beings, in all caſes, and under all poſſible circumſtances where a law or rule of action is wanting; and this denominates it a perfect law. For, were nature deficient in this reſpect in any caſe, or circumſtance whatever, then, the law or rule of action reſulting from it would not be perfect, and conſequently, the law of nature would not be a perfect law, which ſuppoſition is greatly abſurd. So that nature exhibits a proper rule of action to intelligent beings as well *after* they are become offenders, as *antecedent* to the offence committed; that is, nature as much, and as plainly points out to men what they ought to do after they have offended, in order to render themſelves the proper objects of mercy, as it points out to them what they ought to do, ſo as not to ſtand in need of that mercy. I ſay, nature as plainly points out a proper rule of action in this, as in any other caſe. I am ſenſible, this is running counter to our modern Theology, which ſuppoſes that nature is *defective* in this particular, and that there is no proper rule of action reſulting from it with regard to criminals; and conſequently, that God is at liberty to act *arbitrarily* in this reſpect, by appointing what conditions he pleaſe for his creatures to obtain his mercy, and for them to be reconciled to him; but this is groſsly abſurd as I have already obſerved. And,

From hence a queſtion very naturally ariſes, *viz.* what *difference* is there between Dr *Stebbing*'s *Chriſtian Religion* and mine? if I may be allowed to uſe thoſe terms, without being charged with great impropriety. And the anſwer is, that the difference is *very great*. My repreſentation of Chriſtianity is *all natural*, it is pure nature without any *mixture* or *addition*. Whereas, Dr *Stebbing*'s Chriſtian Religion is a *compound*, it is partly *natural*, and partly *artificial*; it is cooked up in a *polite* manner, and after the *French* faſhion, with *high* ſauces, *forced* meats, and *made* diſhes, ſuch as nature and reaſon are perfect ſtrangers to, and by which it is ſuited to the *vitiated* appetites of mankind. But then, it ought to be remembered, that no doctrine is to be admitted, or at leaſt ought to be admitted, as an *important truth*, until upon a fair trial it is *proved* to be ſuch; and therefore, the doctrines of atonement, of propitiation, of pecuniary mulcts, of tranſubſtantiation, and the like, theſe muſt *all be tried* before they be admitted; and if upon a fair trial theſe, or either of them, ſhall plainly appear to have the ſtamp of *reaſon* and *truth* upon them, then, where that appears to be the caſe, every ſuch doctrine ought, for that reaſon, to be *received*; but if upon ſuch trial theſe doctrines, or either of them, ſhall be found *wanting*, then, where ſuch *defect* appears, every ſuch doctrine ought, for that reaſon, to be *rejected*.

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There are many *words* and even *aſſertions* in the New Teſtament that are either mere *figures* of *ſpeech*, or elſe are only *alluſions* to what took place amongſt men, and in particular to what took place among the Jews under the diſpenſation of *Moſes*. And though the doctrines that are or may be grounded upon theſe, may afford matter for an *artful harangue*; yet a little attention will diſcover that they will not bear being reaſoned upon, without being found wanting. Thus for example, it is aſſerted that *Chriſt ſits at the right-hand of God*, which aſſertion ſeems at leaſt to imply that God is a *material* being, who, in ſome particular place in the univerſe, ſits on a glorious throne, and that Chriſt, as his ſon, ſits in a chair of ſtate at his right-hand; in which ſenſe, probably, thoſe words are underſtood by many young and tender minds, who have been taught frequently to repeat them from the time they firſt came to the uſe of ſpeech. Now, tho' what is thus *implied* in the forementioned aſſertion, may with as much *juſtneſs* be grounded upon it, as other doctrines are grounded upon other words or aſſertions in the New Teſtament; yet it is not to be *admitted*, becauſe the contrary can be *proved*, viz. that God is an *immaterial* being, who is preſent in the ſame manner, kind, and degree, in every part of infinite ſpace; and conſequently, has no right-hand for Chriſt to be placed at. So that theſe words, *viz. Chriſt ſits at God's right-hand*, tho' they are made an

article of *Chriſtian Faith*; yet, I think, can be no other than an *alluſion* to the cuſtom and uſage of an *earthly prince*, who, when ſeated on his throne, has his *ſon*, or the *heir apparent* to his crown, ſitting at his right-hand; and as to what we are to underſtand by it, and learn from it, theſe are queſtions that at preſent I am not concerned with. In like manner, Chriſt is ſaid to be *the propitiation for the ſins of the whole world*, which words, as they ſtand in our tranſlation, 1 *John* ii. 2. are ſcarce ſenſe; and if we underſtand them to mean, that Chriſt by his *mediation*, or any other way, diſpoſes or inclines God to be *propitious* to a ſinful world, then, in this ſenſe they cannot poſſibly be true, becauſe God is *in himſelf*, and from his *own nature*, diſpoſed and inclined to be propitious to all ſuch ſinners as ſhall render themſelves the proper objects of his mercy *antecedent to*, and *independent* of, Chriſt's undertaking, and therefore, cannot poſſibly be made ſo by it. And this truth is as evident and plain as that God is not material. It is the *evil* diſpoſition of mind that takes place in us, and is the ground and cauſe of all our tranſgreſſions, which is the ground of God's diſlike of us, and of his reſentment againſt us; and therefore, there cannot poſſibly be any thing in nature which can render God *actually propitious*, that is, which can actually remove God's diſlike and reſentment, but the *actual removal* of that which is the *ground* and *cauſe* of theſe, *viz.* the

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evil diſpoſition of mind that takes place in us; and then, as the cauſe is taken away, the effect ought, and conſequently, moſt certainly will ceaſe. This is ſo plain and obvious that men of common abilities with a little attention muſt perceive it; and therefore, it would be offering the *greateſt affront* to Dr *Stebbing*, to ſuppoſe that a man of his ſuperior abilities and greater attention does not. It will not be ſufficient to urge, that the doctrines of atonement, of propitiation, and the like, as they are uſually underſtood by Chriſtians, are grounded upon the *words* of St *Paul* and St *John*, whoſe miniſtry was backed with *miracles*, and therefore, thoſe doctrines ought to be received as *important truths*; I ſay, it is not ſufficient to urge this, becauſe the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation is grounded upon the words of the *Maſter* of theſe Apoſtles, even *Chriſt himſelf*, and therefore, upon this foot of argument, the doctrine of *tranſubſtantiation* ought much more to be received as an important truth, which yet notwithſtanding is juſtly rejected by Proteſtants. All doctrines therefore as well that of tranſubſtantiation which are grounded upon the *words* and *language of the New Teſtament* ought to be tried, before they be admitted as important truths. And ſeeing, the doctrines of atonement, propitiation, and the like, as they are commonly underſtood by Chriſtians, will not bear the trial without being found wanting; the conſequence is clear, *viz.* that all ſuch doctrines ought to

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be rejected by Chriſtians. And, as to the circumſtance of miracles, no external evidence whatſoever can poſſibly ſo alter the nature of things as to make a falſe propoſition true. Beſides, miracles are evidences, or natural marks, not of the *veracity*, but only of the *power* of the agent that performs them; and therefore, all doctrines and rules of action that are delivered under the pretext of miracles ought to be tried, before they be admitted. And, agreeably to this principle, *Moſes* gave it in charge to the people of *Iſrael*, *Deut.* xiii. 1. and ſo on. *If there ariſe among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a ſign or a wonder, and the ſign or the wonder come to paſs, ſaying let us go after other gods, (which thou haſt not known) and let us ſerve them; thou ſhalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams*; &c.

I have already obſerved, that the *ſum total* of Dr *Stebbing*'s charge, is, that what I have repreſented to be the *True Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt* is *Heatheniſm*, mere Heatheniſm; or, in other words, it is *Deiſm* and *Infidelity*; theſe, I think, being uſed by him as ſynonymous terms, and which, by his own conſtruction, in a parallel * caſe, is the ſame as to ſay, that I am

* See the Reverend Dr *Stebbing*'s Controverſy with the Reverend Mr *Foſter*; in which, when Mr *Foſter* had charged the Doctor with having maintained a *Mahometan* maxim, *viz.* the laying pecuniary mulcts on Diſſenters, the

am an Infidel, a Deiſt, a Heathen, yea a mere Heathen. Theſe are hard names or terms of reproach as they are commonly uſed and underſtood, and which, I think, in the preſent caſe, can anſwer no other purpoſe than to render me odious and contemptible; and this is a ſhort and eaſy way of dealing with an adverſary. However, the point with me, is, (as I have already obſerved) whether what I have advanced be the *truth*, with reſpect to which Dr *Stebbing* hath not yet ſhewn the contrary; and not what name it is to be called by, or that I am to be called on account of it, and therefore, the Doctor may go on with his invectives, which are well ſuited to anſwer low, mean, and baſe purpoſes. Beſides, thoſe characters of Infidel, Deiſt, Heathen, *&c.* may with as much *juſtneſs* and *propriety* be fixed upon *other perſons* as upon me, whom yet, ſurely, Dr *Stebbing* would not chuſe to treat in this way; and therefore, if the Doctor's Viſitation Charge is to be conſidered as an *anſwer* to my book, then, there is a *reply*, which has been prepared long ſince, *viz.* a Sermon preached by the Right Reverend Dr *Sherlocke* now Lord Biſhop of *Saliſbury*, at *Bow-Church*, *London*, on the 17th of *February*

the Doctor, in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, poured out his complaint to the publick, that Mr *Foſter* would make him a *mere Turk*; and yet he makes no ſcruple to uſe the author in the ſame way. Though perhaps, to do as one would be done by, is a principle too low and mean, *too Heatheniſh* for Dr *Stebbing* to make it a rule of action to himſelf.

February 1715, before the Society for propagating the Goſpel in Foreign Parts; which *Sermon*, I conceive, to be a *full and complete reply* to the aforeſaid *Charge*; and therefore, to it I refer my readers for their farther ſatisfaction, or, at leaſt, to what I have quoted from it in the foregoing Enquiry; and to which Sermon or Reply Dr *Stebbing* may make a rejoynder if he pleaſe.

To conclude this Poſtſcript, I obſerve, that as the book Dr *Stebbing* refers to has made a great noiſe in the world; ſo ſeveral books and pamphlets (whereof the Doctor's Viſitation Charge is one) have been publiſhed *called* anſwers to it, the ſhewing the *weakneſs* and *impertinence* of which, would not be of much uſe or benefit to my readers; and therefore, I have rather choſen to repreſent to them what are the *ſolid grounds* upon which *true religion* is founded, as in the precedent Enquiry, the attending to which Enquiry will be much more ſubſervient to their improvement in uſeful knowledge and virtue, than to a wrangling controverſy. And if Dr *Stebbing*, or any other perſon has wherewith to oppoſe; they may ſhew off as ſoon as they pleaſe. There is nothing ſo plain and evident but what artful men may find out ways to darken and perplex; and, tho' this may take with the weak and inattentive, yet men of underſtanding can ſee through ſuch diſguiſes, and therefore, to their judgments I readily ſubmit what I have written.

I will

I will only add, that as Dr *Stebbing*'s charge is a much clearer proof of *ſtrong paſſion*, than *ſound reaſon*; ſo, I fear, it was the produce of his *reſentment*; namely, for my having publickly called upon him to *reconſider* his *falſe* and *evil doctrince* of pecuniary mulcts, and either publickly to defend it, or give it up; one or other of which, ſurely, he ought to have done, though I have not heard he has yet done either. I call the * forementioned doctrine falſe and evil, becauſe, I think, I have *proved it* to be *both*, in my letter to the Reverend Dr *Stebbing*, on that ſubject; which letter I ordered to be ſent to him, and, I doubt not, but it was ſent accordingly.

* See the author's ſecond letter to the Reverend Dr *Stebbing*.

A SHORT

DISSERTATION

ON

Matt. xix. 21. *If thou wilt be perfect, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give to the poor, and thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

Occaſioned by Dr STEBBING's unjuſt and groundleſs reflexion on the author, with regard to this text, in his Viſitation Charge, delivered to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of *Wilts.*

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A SHORT DISSERTATION ON

Matt. xix. 21. *If thou wilt be perfect, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give to the poor, and thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

IN order to judge *rightly* of the ſenſe and meaning of our Lord in theſe words, I think, *three* things muſt be enquired into, as previous to it. *viz. Firſt*, wherein human perfection conſiſts; if thou wilt be perfect. *Secondly*, who are the poor; give to the poor. *Thirdly*, whether, and how far chuſing extream poverty, by diveſting our ſelves of all property in worldly goods, in order to make thoſe that are poor not ſo, or leſs ſo, be neceſſary to human perfection; if thou wilt be perfect, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give to the poor, *&c.*

Firſt, I am to enquire wherein human perfection conſiſts. The perfection of any intelligent being, I think, conſiſts in his being perfectly

perfectly ſubject in mind and action to the law of his nature; that is, to that law or rule of affection and action which is ſuitable to and reſults from his make and conſtitution, his circumſtances and relations, and which that creature ought in reaſon to be ſubject to, and be governed by. And, as that intelligent being called *man* is a compound, conſiſting partly of underſtanding, of appetite, of affection, *&c:* ſo the *perfection* of man conſiſts in a perfect ſubmiſſion of the whole compoſition to the law of his nature, or to that law which in reaſon he ought to be governed by. When the various appetites and paſſions that take place in man are conſtantly and uniformly directed to, and placed upon, their proper objects; when each and every of theſe are kept in due bounds, one not indulged to the ſuppreſſing of another; when the ſprings of action in man, *viz.* ſelfiſhneſs and benevolence, hope and fear, and the like, are duly ballanced, ſo as that one has not the aſcendant over the others; and, when all theſe, together with the principle of activity or ſelf-motion, are wholly ſubject to that principle of intelligence which is likewiſe a part of the human conſtitution, and which was intended to guide and direct the whole; then, ſuch a creature may be ſaid to be *perfect*, according to the meaſure and degree of his nature, as he is perfectly ſubject to the law of it, or to ſuch a law as in reaſon ſuch a compound creature ought to be ſubject to, and be governed by.

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This I call *human perfection*, not in diſtinction from, but conſidered to be the ſame with *Chriſtian perfection*. The deſign of Chriſtianity was to engage us to act the part, and to fill up the juſt and proper characters of *men*; and not to enable us to fill up the characters of *Angels*, or any other ſpecies of beings who are differently conſtituted, circumſtanced, and related, and as ſuch have a different law, and a different kind of perfection to attain, or come up to. Or, in other words, the deſign of Chriſtianity was to make us *good men*; and not to make us *more* or *better* than men; and therefore, Chriſtian perfection muſt be the ſame as human perfection. Again,

Secondly, I am to enquire who are the poor. As the various good things which God hath provided for the uſe and comfortable ſubſiſtence of men, are variouſly poſſeſſed by them; ſo he whoſe ſhare of property in theſe is not ſufficient to procure the comforts, and ſupply the neceſſities of life, ſuch a man is ſaid to be *poor*; as he, on the other ſide, whoſe ſhare of property in theſe is much more than ſufficient to anſwer the forementioned purpoſes, is ſaid to be *rich*. And men are more or leſs rich, or poor, as their ſhare of property in worldly good things is more, or leſs *abundant*, or more, or leſs *ſcanty* as aforeſaid. And, as this world's good things were kindly intended, by the Creator of all, to ſupply the wants, and to yield a comfortable ſubſiſtance to our whole ſpecies; and, as a comfortable paſſage through

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life is greatly deſirable in itſelf, and as ſuch it is the proper object of every man's choice, for himſelf, and for others; ſo this renders it reaſonable and fit that thoſe who greatly abound, ſhould ſupply the neceſſities of thoſe who want. Again,

Thirdly, I am to enquire whether, and how far chuſing *extream poverty*, by diveſting our ſelves of all property in worldly goods, in order to make others that are poor not ſo, or leſs ſo, be *neceſſary to human perfection*. I have already obſerved, that human perfection conſiſts in a man's perfectly conforming himſelf, that is, his whole compoſition, to the law of his nature; which law requires that thoſe who abound, ſhould ſupply the neceſſities of thoſe who want. And, if ſuch circumſtances ſhould take place as render it reaſonable for a man to part with all that he hath for the poor's ſake, (which is very rarely if ever the caſe) then, and under theſe circumſtances, the ſelling all and giving it to the poor becomes a man's *duty*, or it is neceſſary to human perfection. But then, when, and where theſe circumſtances do not take place, the chuſing extream poverty, by diveſting our ſelves of all property in worldly goods, in order to make others that are poor not ſo, or leſs ſo, is ſo far from being neceſſary to human perfection, that, on the contrary, it is in itſelf *an imperfection*, and is juſtly *blameable* and *condemnable*. Extream poverty is not in itſelf deſirable, it is not the object of our choice when conſidered ſimply,

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and therefore, is never to be choſen for it's own ſake; nor is it to be choſen in order to make others that are poor not ſo, or leſs ſo. For though, we are to love our neighbours *as our ſelves*, and conſequently, are to purſue their happineſs as well as our own; yet we are not to love them *better than our ſelves*, becauſe we are, and ought to be as near and dear to our ſelves as our neighbours are, and becauſe we have as good a title to the comforts of life as our neighbours can have; and therefore, it cannot poſſibly be our duty to love our neighbours better than our ſelves. So that though, the law of our nature requires that thoſe who abound, ſhould ſupply the neceſſities of thoſe who want; yet it does not require that the former ſhould change circumſtances with the latter. Extream poverty and want are in themſelves the proper objects of our *averſion* and *ſhunning*, and what we are to uſe all proper endeavours by labour, induſtry, and other means, to keep our ſelves from; and therefore, are never to be choſen by us, but when the *neceſſity* of the caſe requires it, ſuppoſing ſuch neceſſitous caſes may happen. So that were we to chuſe extream poverty, by diveſting our ſelves of all property in worldly goods, when the circumſtances of the caſe does not require it, nor make it neceſſary, this would be ſo far from being *human perfection*, that, on the contrary, it would be *an imperfection*, as it would be a defect of duty towards our ſelves, and acting againſt the law of our nature, and, as ſuch,

it would be juſtly blameable and condemnable.

To this I may add, the declaration of our Lord, as it is referred to by St *Paul*, *Acts* xx. 35. *I have ſhewed you all things, how that ſo labouring ye ought to ſupport the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jeſus, how he ſaid, it is more bleſſed to give than to receive.* Now if it is more bleſſed to give than to receive, as our Lord hath expreſsly declared it is; then, it is more bleſſed, or better to have it in our power to give, than to be in ſuch circumſtances as render it fit for us to receive; that is, it is more bleſſed, or better to be *rich*, than to be *poor*, and conſequently, we ought not to change the former for the latter, and we ſhall be juſtly blameable if we do. So that according to this declaration of our Lord, the chuſing extream poverty, by diveſting our ſelves of all property in worldly goods, in order to make thoſe that are poor not ſo, or leſs ſo, is ſo far from being human or Chriſtian perfection, that, on the contrary, it is itſelf an *imperfection* and juſtly *blameable*. This is the opinion of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt touching this matter. But then, how far the doctrines advanced by Papiſts, or by our preſent Methodiſts, are affected by it, I ſhall not enquire.

Having thus prepared the way, by ſhewing wherein human perfection conſiſts, who are the poor, and how far diveſting our ſelves of all property in worldly good things for the poors ſake is neceſſary to human or Chriſtian perfection;

perfection; I think, it will not be hard nor difficult to diſcover the ſenſe and meaning of our Lord's words, in the text under conſideration: *viz. if thou wilt be perfect, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give to the poor*, &c. St *Matthew* informs us, that one came unto Chriſt, and ſaid unto him, *Good Maſter, what good thing ſhall I do that I may have eternal life?* This queſtion ſeems to be grounded on a vulgar error that took place among the Jews, namely, that there was a *particular* commandment, a ſtrict obedience to which would excuſe the neglect of the reſt of the commandments, and would render a man acceptable to God. Our Lord, to correct this error, and to anſwer the man's queſtion plainly and fully at the ſame time, told him that obedience to the *whole law* was that *good thing*; and not a ſtrict obedience to one branch of his duty, with a neglect of the reſt, expreſſed in theſe words, *if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.* This anſwer though plain and full, did not diſcharge the man's mind from the forementioned error, and therefore, it was not ſatisfactory to him; he ſtill thinking that there was one peculiar command that he muſt pay a ſtrict obedience to, and this led him to put a *ſecond* queſtion, *viz.* which of thoſe commandments muſt he keep? To which our Lord made a *ſecond* reply, in which he did not expreſs himſelf in general terms as before, but deſcended to particulars; only theſe particulars related moſtly to the negative parts of our

duty, *viz.* what we are not to do, and not to what we are, as in theſe words, *Thou ſhalt do no murder*; *Thou ſhalt not commit adultery*; *Thou ſhalt not ſteal*; &c. The young man being conſcious to himſelf that he had paid a ſtrict regard to theſe negative parts of his duty, readily (and no doubt very honeſtly) replied, all theſe things have I kept from my youth up; but being in doubt whether this contained the whole of his duty, he therefore, put a *third* queſtion, *viz.* What lack I yet? Our Lord being fully ſatisfied wherein his great defect lay, namely, in point of benevolence, anſwered him in theſe words, *If thou wilt be perfect, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give to the poor, and thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

In this anſwer it is the ſame as if our Lord had ſaid, if thou wilt be perfect, which conſiſts in the diſcharge of thy whole duty, then, thou muſt not reſt ſatisfied in paying obedience to the negative parts of it only, that is, in not doing evil; but thou muſt pay a ſtrict and proper regard to the more noble parts of it, which conſiſt in doing good. Thou muſt put on ſuch a benevolent diſpoſition of mind as will diſpoſe thee to be concerned for, and to purſue thy neighbour's good and happineſs as well as thy own; thou muſt render thy ſelf as uſeful in the world as thou canſt, by uſing thy abundance to ſupply the neceſſities of thoſe who want, and by doing all that good to others which thy ſuperior circumſtances enable thee

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to do. In a word, thou muſt love thy neighbours as thy ſelf, which will engage thee to part with all for their ſakes, if ever the circumſtance of things ſhould require it, or make it neceſſary. And if thou wilt do this when the circumſtances of things ſhall require it, and which it is as much thy duty to do, as thoſe other acts of obedience are that thou haſt hitherto paid a ſtrict regard to, then thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven, or, in other words eternal life. Or, if thou wouldſt become my *diſciple* in that *particular* and *ſpecial manner* as theſe men are whom thou now ſeeſt with me, by devoting thy perſon and property wholly to the ſervice of mankind, in the exerciſe of that miniſtry I ſhall appoint thee to, and by thy yielding up life itſelf, for their ſakes, when called to it, which is the higheſt act of benevolence thou canſt perform, if it ſprings from a benevolent mind, and the higheſt degree of perfection thou canſt attain to; then, thou muſt quit all worldly affairs, thou muſt expect, and therefore prepare thy ſelf, to ſuffer reproach, and all manner of evil in the doing that work to which thou wilt be appointed; and thou muſt become my immediate and conſtant attendant. This, I think, is a juſt and true paraphraſe of our Lord's words, or at moſt it is all that can fairly be collected or concluded from it.

As ſelling all and giving it to the poor, is one of the *higheſt acts* by which a true benevolent mind can ſhew itſelf; and as our Lord

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choſe to expreſs the poſitive parts of that duty we owe to our neighbours in a few words; ſo he thought it proper to expreſs the whole by one of the higheſt acts of duty of the kind. For, whoever from a true charitable or benevolent diſpoſition of mind will part with all he poſſeſſes for the good of his fellow-creatures, when the caſe requires that he ſhould, ſuch a man will moſt certainly do all the leſſer acts of duty of the ſame kind. And therefore, as our Lord choſe to expreſs all the poſitive duties we owe to our neighbours by *one act only*; ſo it was very ſuitable and proper that he ſhould do it by one of the higheſt of the kind, as in the inſtance above. In like manner, when St *Paul* conſiders thoſe actions that have the appearance of being benevolent, as diſtinct from that benevolent diſpoſition of mind they ought to ſpring from, but do not, he makes uſe of the ſame inſtance, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 3. *And though I beſtow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.* This, to appearance, is one of the higheſt acts of benevolence; and yet when it is the offſpring of any other principle than a true benevolent mind, St *Paul* aſſures us, it ſtands for nought in God's account. And, as this is true in the inſtance of giving all to the poor; ſo it is equally the ſame of all leſſer acts of like kind.

Our Lord expreſſed the ſame thing, with the like brevity, tho' in different words, upon another occaſion, as in *Matt.* xvi. 24. *Then ſaid*

ſaid Jeſus unto his diſciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs, and follow me. By denying himſelf, I think, our Lord muſt mean, the rooting out of a man's heart that principle of *covetouſneſs* or *vicious ſelf-love*, which is the great corruption of human nature, and the governing principle in wicked men; and the poſſeſſing himſelf with the contrary diſpoſition, *viz.* a truly *generous* or *benevolent* mind; it being this that renders us like our beneficent Creator, and therefore, truly acceptable to him. The young man referred to, his heart was ſo ſet upon his riches, that it was to him the greateſt of evils to part with them, even when the caſe required that he ſhould. And, this gave occaſion for our Saviour to inform him, that if he would be perfect, he muſt not reſt ſatisfied in having performed the negative parts of his duty only; but muſt perform the poſitive parts alſo. And, this likewiſe gave occaſion for our Lord's remark, *viz. how hardly ſhall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!* Great riches are apt to engroſs the hearts and affections of thoſe who poſſeſs them, and this ſhuts up their bowels of tenderneſs and compaſſion to the reſt of their fellow-creatures. And tho' a man's benevolent actions ought to be proportioned to his wealth and riches, and to the ſtreightned circumſtances of his neighbours; yet great poſſeſſions and great benevolence ſeldom meet in the ſame perſon; and this juſti-

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fies our Saviour's remark as aforeſaid. Men, like the young man referred to, are too apt to reſt ſatisfied with not having done evil, whereas, our Lord aſſures us, that as great a regard muſt be had for doing good, as for not doing evil, and that a defect in the *former*, as well as in the latter, will render us juſtly blameable and condemnable. *Matt.* xxv. 41. and ſo on. *Then ſhall he ſay alſo unto them on his left-hand, depart from me ye curſed into everlaſting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirſty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a ſtranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye cloathed me not; ſick, and in priſon, and ye viſited me not.* —— *Verily, I ſay unto you, in as much as ye did it not to one of the leaſt of theſe, ye did it not to me. And theſe ſhall go away into everlaſting puniſhment; but the righteous into life eternal.* A benevolent diſpoſition is the moſt noble and God-like part of our nature, and, is therefore called the perfection of it. *Luke* vi. 36. *Be ye therefore merciful*, (or kind and benevolent) *as your Father is merciful*; which according to St *Matthew*, chap. v. ver. 48. is the ſame as to ſay, *be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* And, St *Paul* ſaith, *Romans* xiii. 10. that *love is the fulfilling of the law.* So that to be perfect, according to the ſenſe and meaning of our Lord, is to put on ſuch a benevolent diſpoſition, as will diſpoſe and engage us to purſue the good and happineſs of

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our neighbours as well as our own, and ſo far as we have power and opportunity for doing it; and if the circumſtances of things require it, to part with our all, in this world, for their ſakes. *If thou wilt be perfect, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give to the poor, and thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

The uſe that I would make of this diſcourſe, is, to obſerve to my readers, that in my book intitled *The True Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt aſſerted*, I ſummed up that good news which Chriſt was in a particular and ſpecial manner ſent of God to acquaint the world with, under *three* heads or propoſitions, the *firſt* of which was this, *viz.* That *Chriſt requires, and recommends a conformity of mind and life to that rule of action that is founded in the reaſon of things; and makes or declares that compliance to be the ſole ground of divine acceptance, and the only way to life eternal.* And, to prove or make good this propoſition, I quoted the young man's queſtion, that he put to our Lord, *viz. Good Maſter, what good thing ſhall I do that I may have eternal life?* And likewiſe our Lord's plain and full anſwer to this important queſtion, *viz. If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments*; and alſo the man's *ſecond* queſtion, with our Lord's *anſwer* to it. But then, though I did not relate the young man's *third* queſtion, *viz. What lack I yet*; nor our Lord's *anſwer*, viz. *If thou wilt be perfect*, &c. becauſe the *third* anſwer, like the *ſecond*, was, as I

 apprehend,

apprehend, only an explanation of what our Lord had ſaid in the *firſt*; yet I did not ſtifle, ſuppreſs, or conceal it, ſuppoſing it to be againſt me, as the Reverend Dr *Stebbing* has very *unkindly* and *unjuſtly* repreſented, or at leaſt inſinuated I have done. However, as I have, in the foregoing Diſſertation, ſhewed what I apprehended to be the ſenſe and meaning of our Lord in his *anſwer* to the young man's *third* queſtion; ſo, I hope, I have hereby taken away the *ground* of Dr *Stebbing*'s *complaint*, or rather *accuſation* againſt me; and have alſo farther *made good* the above propoſition, *viz.* that Chriſt requires, and recommends a conformity of mind and life to that rule of action that is founded in the reaſon of things; and makes or declares that compliance to be the ſole ground of divine acceptance, and the only way to life eternal. *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*

From what I have offered, my readers may ſee, that though it may be a man's duty, under *ſome* circumſtances, to ſell what he hath and give it to the poor; yet it is not *every* man's duty, under *all* circumſtances; nor has Chriſt made this the *ground* of our acceptance with God; which yet he muſt have done, for this text to be *pertinently* urged againſt me. And, as to diſcipleſhip, I farther obſerve, that though to be a *diſciple* of Chriſt, by being appointed, and ſent forth to preach the Goſpel to the world, in like manner as the *twelve* were, requires a man's quitting his worldly affairs,

affairs, his devoting himſelf wholly to the work of the Goſpel, and his going up and down the world preaching it *freely to all* without diſtinction; yet to be Chriſt's *diſciple* in like manner as Dr *Stebbing* profeſſes himſelf to be, does not require this; or if it does, then, ſurely, the Doctor's conduct, as a *diſciple* of Chriſt, is very prepoſterous; who has not only added to thoſe worldly advantages which ariſe to him from his *two Livings* in *Norfolk*, and his being *Preacher* at *Grays-Inn*, what ariſes to him from the *Archdeaconry* of *Wilts*; but he is alſo adding what ariſes from the *Chancellorſhip* of the *Dioceſe* of *Sarum*; and which worldly advantages, no doubt, he ſtands diſpoſed to *double*, or *treble*, if he has, or ſhall have, intereſt enough to anſwer that purpoſe. Good God! Is this ſelling all, and giving it to the poor? Is this taking up the Croſs, and going out into the world, without purſe, and without ſcrip, not having two coats, preaching the Goſpel *freely* to all? Or, is it not rather, as the Prophet expreſſes it, (*Iſaiah* v. 8.) *adding* houſe to houſe, and field to field? Or, like pulling down barns and building greater? Or, is it not like the horſe-leech, which cries give, give, and is never ſatisfied? And, if ſelling all and giving it to the poor, be, at *all times* and under *all circumſtances*, neceſſary to conſtitute a diſciple of Chriſt; then, tho' Chriſtians are *thick ſown*, in this part of the world, yet they are very *thin ſprung up*, ſeeing among that numberleſs multitude who have by their

ſponſors renounced the world at the font, where they were received into the flock of Chriſt, few, very few, have ever had *this mark* of diſcipleſhip upon them: and then, the *extravagancies* of our preſent Methodiſts may well be admitted as *parts* of Chriſtianity, which yet Dr *Stebbing* and others of our dignified Clergy have thought fit to oppoſe. Though, by the way, it is not altogether unuſual for ſome of our Reverend Doctors of Divinity to be both for and againſt a thing, juſt as the point in view renders it expedient for them to be either. Thus, upon an occaſion, and to ſerve a turn, ſuch as the *waging war* with Mr *Whitefield*, or with any other perſon or party who go farther lengths in Enthuſiaſm or Superſtition than the *preſent ſtandard* of Orthodoxy will admit, upon ſuch occaſion theſe gentlemen are ready to call into their aid *reaſon* and *common ſenſe*, and to plead for the uſe of theſe even in matters of religion; whereas upon other occaſions, and when other, and perhaps contrary, purpoſes are to be ſerved, then, the uſe of reaſon and common ſenſe in matters of religion is not to be admitted, but theſe are to be exploded as carnal and unhallowed things.

That *new circumſtances* and *new relations* introduce *new obligations* and *new duties*, is true; but then, this makes nothing againſt me, becauſe thoſe new duties and obligations naturally flow from thoſe new circumſtances and relations, and as ſuch are founded in the *reaſon* of things;

things; and therefore, what Dr *Stebbing* has urged on the ſubject is *void of argument*. However, as the knowing what is the *true* ſenſe and meaning of our Lord, in the text under conſideration, is a matter of *importance* to Chriſtians; and as Dr *Stebbing* has been pleaſed to introduce the ſubject, and has *drawn*, or rather *forced me* into an examination of it: ſo I hope he will carefully and attentively conſider what I have offered upon it. And, I think, it behoves him either publickly to acknowledge that I have done *juſtice* to the text, or elſe ſhew plainly to the world that I have not. Though, perhaps, the Doctor may think ſuch *fair practiſing as this* is more ſuitable to his *mere Heathen*, who has nothing but an *honeſt upright heart*, and a *virtuous life* to ground his expectation of God's favour and future happineſs upon; than to an *orthodox Divine* who has the doctrines of *atonement*, *propitiation*, and the like, to be the authors of his hope.

Nevertheleſs, it muſt be acknowledged, that Dr *Stebbing* is a *great man* *, and very much *my*

* See a marginal note added to Dr *Stebbing*'s Charge, where the Doctor ſays, that the author has not proved a point in a tract which the Doctor acknowledges he has not read; and the reaſon upon which this judgment of the Doctor's is grounded, is, that men greater than the author have not proved it. The author does not enter into the queſtion whether Dr *Stebbing*'s reaſoning in the preſent caſe is concluſive, or not; but only obſerves, that as he (the author) does not put his abilities in competition with the abilities of any man; ſo he hopes to meet with other kind of uſage from all other men of underſtanding, and that he ſhall not be condemned without being heard.

my ſuperior; who, if I may be allowed to uſe the ſimilitude, has been *trained in arms*, has been a *man of war* from his youth up until now; and therefore, his *beſpeaking victory* is not to be wondered at. Yea, with regard to *John* viii. 24. he ſeems to claim the *triumphs of conqueſt*. For, if ye believe not that I am he, ye *ſhall* die in your ſins. Though I do not underſtand Greek, yet, I think, I may venture to ſay, that the word which our Tranſlators have rendered [ſhall] would with much greater propriety have been rendered [will] and then the text ſtands thus. For, if ye believe not that I am he, ye *will* die in your ſins. Our Lord, in this paſſage, did not take upon him to denounce the judgment of *damnation* upon the *wicked Jews*, for their not believing him to be the *Meſſiah*; but only ſhewed them what would be the *conſequence* of ſuch infidelity. For, if they would not be prevailed upon to believe that he was the *Chriſt*, then there was no reaſon to expect that they would *attend* to his *meſſage*, which called them to repentance and amendment of life. And therefore, ſeeing without *this faith* they would not *repent* and *amend*, which is the *only ground* of God's mercy to ſinners, the conſequence is clear, *they would die in their ſins*; not the *ſin* of *infidelity*, but the *ſins* they had been *antecedently* guilty of; or they would ſuffer the puniſhment due for them. Let not he who *girds* on his armour *boaſt*, as he who *puts it off*.

I am

I am ſenſible, there is lately introduced a diſtinction among Chriſtians, *viz.* thoſe who are *for*, and thoſe who are *againſt* the *mediatorial* ſcheme, as it is called. This gives me an occaſion to obſerve, that I readily acknowledge our Lord Jeſus Chriſt to be a *mediator* ſtrictly and properly ſo called. That is, as a *middle* or an *indifferent perſon*, and not being either of the parties concerned, he has ſtood in the breach, and made up the difference, or has endeavoured to make it up, betwixt an *offended God*, and his *offending creatures men*; by ſtipulating or propounding the terms and conditions of agreement and reconciliation betwixt them; by propoſing to men thoſe motives or arguments of perſuaſion which are proper to engage them to accept of God's mercy and favour upon the terms propounded; and by repreſenting to them what will be the ſad conſequences of their refuſal; this being *all* as a mediator, or middle perſon, he *could do*, or that it *behoved him to do* in the preſent caſe. For, had he went *farther*, and put himſelf in the place, and acted the part of either of the parties concerned; then he would have acted *out of character* as a mediator, and would have perſonated a *principal*, or one of the parties intereſted in the caſe. As thus, ſuppoſing he had perſonated the *offenders*, and had ſuffered in their place and ſtead, (admitting ſuch a thing could be) in ſuch a caſe, he would have acted quite out of character as an indifferent, or middle perſon, or mediator, and would

have

have behaved as a principal, or party concerned in that quarrel or diſpute he was to be a mediator in, and which, by his mediation, he was to put an end to. I ſhall not proceed farther, in expoſing a *pretended* mediatorial ſcheme of Chriſtianity, which ſome of our dignified Clergy contend for, the grand characteriſticks of which are abſurdity and confuſion.

I am likewiſe ſenſible, that our Lord Jeſus Chriſt faithfully executed the office, diſcharged the truſt, and finiſhed the work which he was appointed to, by his Father; for which faithful obedience he has his reward; *God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name*, viz. *that at the name of Jeſus every knee ſhould bow, and every tongue ſhould confeſs that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* But then, the queſtion is, what is this to Dr *Stebbing* or me? Is he, or am I, more or leſs valuable on account of any thing of this? Or is either of us more, or leſs the proper object of God's mercy and favour with reſpect to it? Surely, Dr *Stebbing* cannot but know that we are not. And if ſo, then what colour of reaſon can be aſſigned why any thing of this ſhould be placed either to his, or my account? And this leads me to put thoſe queſtions, *viz.* can a man of underſtanding, who carefully conſiders, and duly attends to the ſubject, think, that God will act ſo very prepoſterouſly, ſo contrary to nature, as to love and approve of one agent, for what is lovely and approvable in the perſon

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of another? Or that he will hate and deteſt one agent, for what was hateful and deteſtable in the perſon of another? This, ſurely, is hard to conceive.

And as Dr *Stebbing*, and the reſt of the Clergy have taken upon them to be *guides* to the people, in the affair of *ſalvation*; ſo, ſurely, it becomes them to take *great heed* to their *miniſtry*, leſt they ſhould prove the *betrayers* of mens ſouls, which, I think, all thoſe are who teach ſuch doctrines as lead men to *hope* for the obtaining of God's mercy and favour in *any other way*, or upon *any other grounds*, than the rendering themſelves the *ſuitable and proper objects of both*; becauſe this is pointing out to men ſuch grounds of reliance, as will moſt certainly diſappoint their truſt. It is not enough to ſay in the preſent caſe, that thoſe who teach men to rely on the merits and interceſſion of Chriſt for mercy and ſalvation at the hands of God, do alſo teach that men muſt alſo repent and live well, or elſe they will have no ſhare in that mercy and ſalvation; I ſay, it is not ſufficient to urge this, becauſe, notwithſtanding this, experience ſhews that men are too apt to rely upon the former, without the latter. Like as in the Church of *Rome*, though *repentance* is made the expreſs condition of *abſolution*; yet men reſt ſatisfied in having the latter, without the former. Theſe are therefore dangerous doctrines, and may prove fatal to mens ſouls. I will therefore take the liberty to remind the *teachers*

among Chriſtians, of what denomination ſoever they be, that if the Goſpel of Chriſt be according to *truth*, and the *word of God*, (which Goſpel they conſider themſelves to be preachers of) then, we are aſſured by it, not only that God will *judge the world*, and that he will do it *by Jeſus Chriſt*, but alſo that he will judge it *in righteouſneſs*, and that he will render to every man, not according to the rectitude, or erroneouſneſs of his judgment in matters of ſpeculation, nor according to the merits or interceſſion that is made to him by another; but only according as every man's *own works* ſhall be, whether they be *good*, or whether they be *evil*. Now, if this be the truth of the caſe, which it muſt be if the Goſpel be true; then nothing can be more evident than this, namely, that *perſonal valuableneſs* is the *only ground* of our acceptance with God. I ſay, nothing can be more apparent. However, I am ſenſible, that *education*, and *old rooted prejudices* have a very great byaſs on the underſtandings and judgments of men, and that theſe are a *ſtrong bar* againſt a careful, and free examination of any ſubject that is contrary to them. But then theſe are not the *only* things that bar up the way to truth; for, according to an old proverb, there are none ſo blind as thoſe who will not ſee. Mens vitiated affections, and particularly a vicious ſelf-love, lead them to *wiſh* and *hope* that they ſhall find mercy and favour at the hands of their Maker, through ſomething that is external to themſelves,

ſelves, through ſomething that they have not, becauſe they have nothing valuable in themſelves to recommend them; and this diſpoſes them to embrace the moſt *palpable* errors, and to cloſe their eyes that they *cannot*, or *will not*, ſee the moſt *obvious* truths. I ſhall conclude this diſcourſe with a very melancholy reflexion, namely, that as the Chriſtian Religion is too much become a *mere faction*, the votaries to which have a *party* and an *intereſt* to ſupport; ſo this becomes a *powerful*, and, it is to be feared, that ſometimes it proves a *prevailing temptation*, to ſome of them, to turn the truth of God into a lie.

AN

ANSWER

TO A

PRIVATE LETTER

FROM A

STRANGER to the AUTHOR,

ON

The Subject of GOD's Foreknowledge.

An ANSWER to a PRIVATE LETTER, &c.

SIR,

I Received your Letter, but whether it will be in my power to contribute any thing towards a removal of that perplexity you complain of, I cannot ſay. In the caſe you refer to, you ſeem to me, to *preſume* a point, without offering a *ſufficient reaſon* to ground that preſumption upon. The point preſumed, is, that God does certainly foreknow every thing that will be; and the reaſon you ground it upon, is, that the want of ſuch foreknowledge implies an imperfection, which, you think, cannot be the caſe with reſpect to God, and therefore, you preſume as above. To which, I think, it will be ſufficient to anſwer, that if the actions of free beings are not in the nature of the thing foreknowable; then, it cannot poſſibly be an imperfection in God for him not to foreknow what is not foreknowable in nature; becauſe ſuch foreknowledge is impoſſible. So that this point muſt *firſt* be proved, *viz.* that the actions of free beings are in the nature of the thing foreknowable, before the want of ſuch preſcience can juſtly be deemed an imperfection.

God is *actually preſent* to *every thing that is*, in every part of ſpace; and, hereby, he has a perfect

perfect *knowledge* or *perception* of every thing that is. God *has been* alſo actually preſent to every thing that *has been*, in every part of ſpace, and through every point of duration that is paſt; and, from hence, I think, we may juſtly conclude that God has likewiſe the moſt perfect *remembrance* of every thing that has been, through every point of duration that is paſt, becauſe every thing that has exiſted *has been* actually preſent to him, and perceived by him. But then, God *is not* actually preſent to any thing that *will be*, in any point of duration to come; and therefore, we have not the like ground for concluding that he perfectly *foreknows* every thing that will be, as we have for concluding that he perfectly *remembers* every thing that has been. So that, tho' the divine *Omnipreſence* is a proper and a ſufficient foundation to ground theſe propoſitions upon, *viz.* that God certainly *knows* every thing that is, becauſe he is actually preſent with it; and, that he perfectly *remembers* every thing that has been, becauſe he has been actually preſent with it, and it has been actually perceived by him; yet, it does not appear, that the divine *Omnipreſence* lays a foundation for us to conclude, with equal certainty that God perfectly *foreknows* every thing that will be, becauſe *he is not* actually preſent to any thing that will be, in any point of duration to come.

If it ſhould be ſaid, that, tho' God is not actually preſent to any thing that will be; yet God can certainly *prejudge*, or *determine* what he himſelf will do, what free agents he will call

call into being, and what will be the conſtitutions, diſpoſitions, and tempers of ſuch agents; and, that this is a proper and a ſufficient foundation in nature for God perfectly to foreknow, or infallibly prejudge, (which comes to the ſame) what every agent will chuſe to do, in every point of duration to come. Anſwer, *firſt*, this is *begging the queſtion*, becauſe the particular conſtitution, diſpoſition, and temper of a perſon, may *reſult* from the temperance or intemperance of his parent, or from other like cauſes; which cauſes were the produce of the parent's free election or choice. So that here the point is preſumed, or taken for granted, which is in diſpute, and ought to be proved. Again, I anſwer *ſecondly*, admitting what is here preſumed, but not proved, *viz.* that God does *foreknow* what will be the particular conſtitution, diſpoſition, and temper of every free being that will exiſt, it will not follow from hence that he can *infallibly prejudge* what every free being will chuſe to do, in every point of duration to come. I ſay, that this conſequence does not neceſſarily follow. For, tho' the particular conſtitution, diſpoſition, and temper of each individual, may afford, or introduce *particular motives* or excitements to action; yet ſeeing the will is not *neceſſarily determined* by thoſe motives, but may and does chuſe to act in *oppoſition*, ſometimes to one motive, and ſometimes to another, and thus, in turn, in oppoſition to them all, which occaſions that mixture of *good* and *bad*, of *wiſe* and *fooliſh* actions, of which moſt, if not all, mens cha-

racters are compounded; therefore, a foreknowledge or prejudgment of the particular conſtitution, &c. does not appear to be a *ſufficient foundation* in nature, for ſuch *preſcience* as is here ſuppoſed. So that, I think, it is not very clear and plain that we have wherewith in nature or reaſon to ground, with certainty, this propoſition upon, *viz.* that God does perfectly foreknow, or infallibly prejudge what every free being will chuſe to do, in every point of duration to come.

But admitting that God does foreknow, or prejudge as aforeſaid, if our actions have *no dependance* upon the divine preſcience, as, moſt certainly, they have not; then, our *liberty* cannot poſſibly be affected by it, (which yet you ſeem to think it is) preſcience and liberty being *as conſiſtent* as any two things in nature can be. You add, for what God foreknows *will be*, cannot *but be*. Anſwer, if by [cannot but be] you mean no more than [will be] then, it is true, tho' it anſwers no purpoſe; becauſe it amounts to no more than this, *viz.* what will be, will be. But if by [cannot but be] you mean [it muſt be from an abſolute neceſſity in the nature of things] then, in this ſenſe, it is not true. Let it be admitted, that God perfectly foreknows, or infallibly prejudges that there will be a *future judgment*; in this caſe, a future judgment will be ſo far from being the *reſult* of any abſolute neceſſity in the nature of things, that, on the contrary, it will reſult wholly from God's *free election* or *choice*. So that, tho' God certainly foreknows there will

will be a judgment to come; yet there may not be a judgment to come, with regard to any abſolute neceſſity in the nature of things for ſuch a judgment, becauſe a judgment to come, will not reſult from ſuch neceſſity, but from the free determination of the Deity, as I have already obſerved.

But farther, admitting that God does foreknow, or infallibly prejudge every thing that will be, and, conſequently, foreknows that ſome free beings will abuſe their liberty, to their own hurt; yet, I think, this ſhould not have been a reaſon to him, as a juſt, wiſe, and good being, to have with-held his hand from giving being to them, which yet, you ſeem to think, it ought to have done. Suppoſe *five* perſons in a boat upon the water to be in ſuch danger, as that without *your interpoſition* they muſt all periſh; and ſuppoſing it to be in your power to ſave them, but that you could not ſave ſome, without ſaving them all; and ſuppoſing you foreknew, or could infallibly prejudge, that *two* of the *five* would abuſe your kindneſs to their greater hurt, ſo that, upon the whole, it would be better for them to periſh in the waters, than to have life lengthened out to them: in this caſe, the queſtions would be, what you ought *in reaſon* to do, under ſuch circumſtances, or what a juſt, wiſe, and good being muſt do, to *act ſuitably* to ſuch a character; whether he muſt *ſave them all*, or let them *all periſh*. If you ſave them all, this would be acting a *kind* and a *good* part by them, as it would ſave their lives, and put it into

their power to improve the kindneſs to their greater future good. And, whereas *two* of the *five* would, upon the whole, be ſufferers; yet that would not be the effect, of your kindneſs, but the produce of their own free election or choice. This would be the ſtate of the caſe, ſuppoſing you ſaved them all. If you ſuffered them all to periſh, then indeed, it would, in the event, prove a *negative* good to *two* of them, as by it they would be prevented from bringing upon themſelves a future greater evil, which otherwiſe would be their caſe. But then, this would be acting a moſt *unkind* and *cruel* part by the other *three*, who would not only loſe their lives, but would alſo be barred the enjoyment of ſuch future greater good, as otherwiſe they would have procured to themſelves. This is the ſtate of the caſe, ſuppoſing you ſuffered them all to periſh. In the *former* of theſe caſes, there is no *injuſtice* done, nor *unkindneſs* ſhewed to any; whereas in the *latter* caſe, your conduct, to ſay the leaſt, would be *greatly unkind* to *three* of the *five*, who, I think, ought not in reaſon to be *barred* your goodneſs, becauſe *two* of the company would abuſe it to their greater hurt.

This, I think, may very juſtly be applied to the conduct of the Deity, in the *creation*, and *government* of the intelligent and moral world. God has called into being a multitude of agents, who are the ſubjects of moral government, on purpoſe that they might attain to *happineſs*; but has left it to *their option* whether that end ſhould *be obtained* by them, or not. And, tho' he fore-

foreknew, or prejudged that *ſome* of thoſe agents, (the number of which I hope will be *greatly ſhort* of *two* in *five*) would abuſe his kindneſs to their much greater hurt; yet, ſurely, that ought not in reaſon to have *barred* his goodneſs to the whole, by with-holding his hand from giving being to them; ſeeing that would have been a very *great hardſhip* and an *injury* to all thoſe who will anſwer the *true ends* of being to themſelves. And as to the others, who will, in the event, and upon the whole, be ſufferers by exiſting, the blame will reſt wholly upon themſelves, becauſe their miſery will be wholly of their own procuring. As to the *duration* of that puniſhment which will be inflicted on wicked men in another world, and which you ſeem to ſtartle at; all, I think, that can with any *certainty* be determined concerning it is only this, *viz.* that whatever *concluſions* men may draw from the *lofty* and *figurative* language of the New Teſtament in this reſpect; yet we are ſure that the judge of all the earth will *do right*, and therefore, there cannot poſſibly be any reaſonable ground of complaint.

If the foregoing reflexions prove ſucceſsful, by removing the perplexity you complain of, my end is anſwered, who am, Sir, your's to ſerve,

Sarum, Auguſt 7, 1739.

THOMAS CHUBB.

FINIS.

BOOKS written by Mr THO. CHUBB, *and printed for* THO. COX, *ſince the Publication of his Collection of Tracts in Quarto*, viz.

I. A Diſcourſe concerning *reaſon*, with regard to *religion* and *divine revelation*. Wherein is ſhewn, That reaſon either *is*, or that it *ought to be*, a *ſufficient guide* in *matters of religion*. Occaſioned by the Lord Biſhop of *London*'s *ſecond* Paſtoral Letter. To which are added, ſome reflexions upon the *comparative excellency* and *uſefulneſs* of *moral* and *poſitive duties*. Occaſioned by the controverſy that has ariſen (with reſpect to this ſubject) upon the publication of Dr *Clarke*'s Expoſition of the Church Catechiſm. The ſecond edition. Price 1 *s*.

II. An enquiry concerning the *grounds* and *reaſons*, or what thoſe *principles* are, upon which two of our anniverſary ſolemnities are founded, *viz.* that on the 30th of *January*, being the day of the martyrdom of King *Charles* the Firſt, appointed to be kept as a day of *faſting*; and that on the 5th of *November*, being the day of our deliverance from popery and ſlavery, by the happy arrival of his late Majeſty, King *William* the Third, appointed to be kept as a day of *thankſgiving*. To which is added, The ſufficieney of reaſon in matters of religion, *farther conſidered*. Wherein is ſhewn, that *reaſon*, when carefully uſed and followed, is to every man, who is anſwerable to God for his actions, under any or all the moſt diſadvantageous circumſtances he can poſſibly fall into, whether he reſides in *China*, or at the *Cape of Good Hope*, a *ſufficient guide in matters of religion*; that is, it is ſufficient to guide him to God's favour, and the happineſs of another world. Price 1 *s*.

III. Four Tracts, *viz. Firſt*, An enquiry concerning the books of the *New Teſtament*, whether they were written by *divine inſpiration*, &c. *Second*, Remarks on *Britannicus*'s letter, publiſhed in the *London Journals* of the 4th and 11th of *April*, 1724; and republiſhed in the *Journals* of the 5th and 12th of *April*, 1729; containing an argument drawn from the *ſingle fact* of *Chriſt*'s *reſurrection*, to prove the *divinity* of his *miſſion*. Wherein is ſhewn, that *Britannicus*'s argument does not anſwer the purpoſe for

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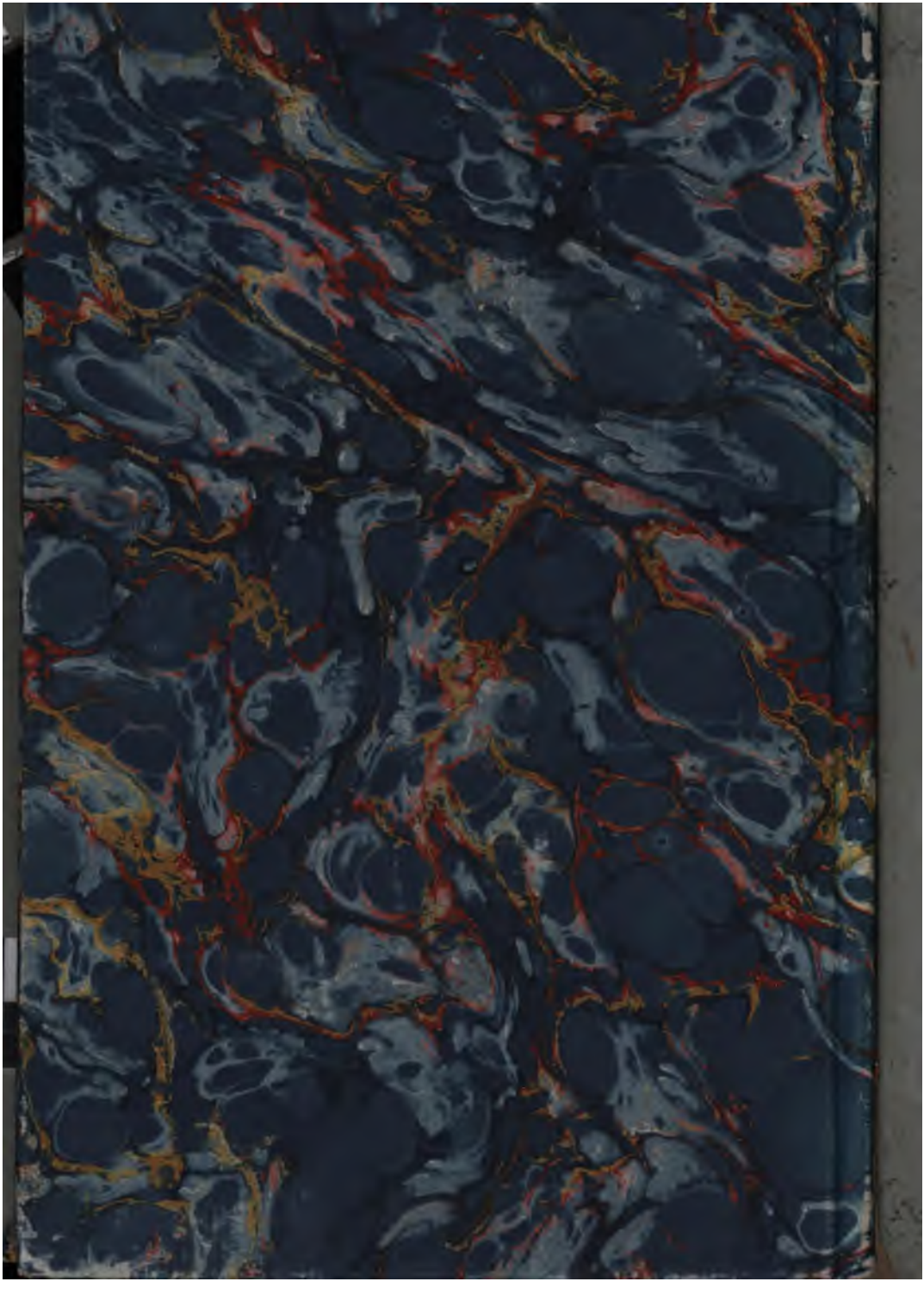
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